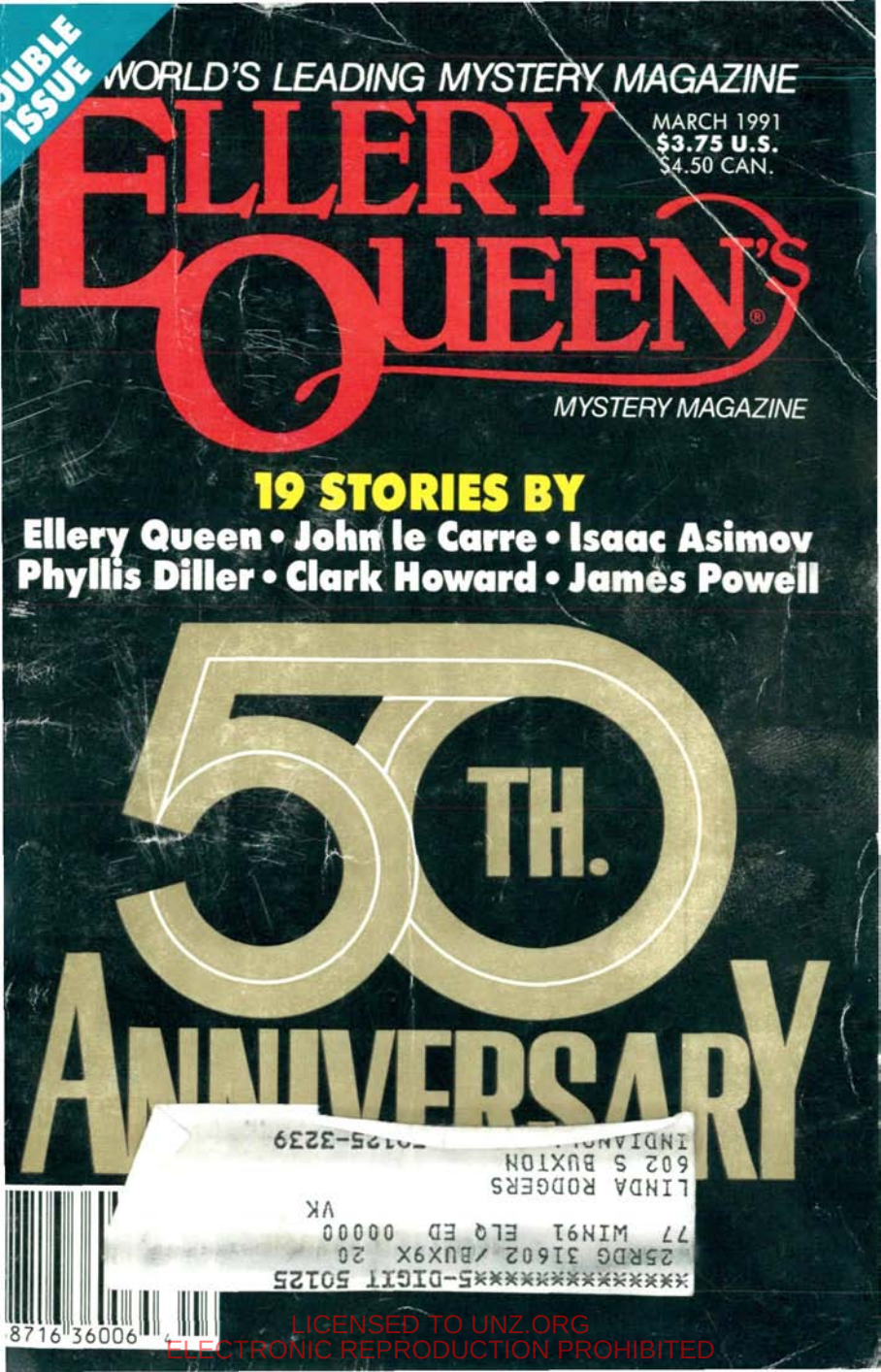

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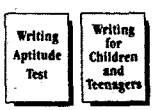

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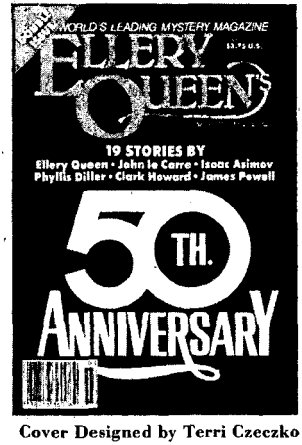
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Issue #580–581 — dedicated to

ELLERY QUEEN

For our anniversary issue, we bring you an Ellery Queen story that has never appeared in these pages before. "The Adventure of the Glass-Domed Clock" is part of the short-story collection The Adventures of Ellery Queen, *a volume Julian Symons praised for being "as absolutely fair and totally puzzling as the most passionate devotee of orthodoxy could wish." The story was written during the Golden Age of detective fiction and so you might find Ellery with his pince-nez and the Inspector dipping into his snuff-box slightly affectatious, but don't let their mannerisms throw you off the scent.*

In his critical history, Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective, *Francis M. Nevins, Jr., called this story "probably the earliest specimen of the Queenian specialty, concealing the obvious answer right under the reader's nose by mesmeric but completely fair misdirection."*

The reader is warned . . .

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GLASS-DOMED CLOCK

by ELLERY QUEEN

Of all the hundreds of criminal cases in the solution of which Mr. Ellery Queen participated by virtue of his self-imposed authority as son of the famous Inspector Queen of the New York Detective Bureau, he has steadfastly maintained that none offered a simpler diagnosis than the case which he has designated as "The Adventure of the Glass-Domed Clock." "So simple," he likes to

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say—sincerely!—"that a sophomore student in high school with the most elementary knowledge of algebraic mathematics would find it as easy to solve as the merest equation." He has been asked, as a result of such remarks, what a poor untutored first-grade detective on the regular police force—whose training in algebra might be something less than elementary—could be expected to make of such a "simple" case. His invariably serious response has been: "Amendment accepted. The resolution now reads: Anybody with common sense could have solved that crime. It's as basic as five minus four leaves one."

This was a little cruel, when it is noted that among those who had opportunity—and certainly wishfulness—to solve the crime was Mr. Ellery Queen's own father, the Inspector, certainly not the most stupid of criminal investigators. But then Mr. Ellery Queen, for all his mental prowess, is sometimes prone to confuse his definitions: viz., his uncanny capacity for strict logic is far from the average citizen's common sense. Certainly one would not be inclined to term elementary a problem in which such components as the following figured: a pure purple amethyst, a somewhat bedraggled expatriate from Czarist Russia, a silver loving-cup, a poker game, five birthday encomiums, and of course that peculiarly ugly relic of early Americana catalogued as "the glass-domed clock"—among others!

On the surface, the thing seems too utterly fantastic, a maniac's howling nightmare. Anybody with Ellery's cherished "common sense" would have said so. Yet when he arranged those weird elements in their proper order and pointed out the "obvious" answer to the riddle—with that almost monastic intellectual innocence of his, as if everybody possessed his genius for piercing the veil of complexities!—Inspector Queen, good Sergeant Velie, and the others figuratively rubbed their eyes, the thing was so clear.

It began, as murders do, with a corpse. From the first, the eeriness of the whole business struck those who stood about in the faintly musked atmosphere of Martin Orr's curio shop and stared down at the shambles that had been Martin Orr. Inspector Queen, for one, refused to credit the evidence of his old senses; and it was not the gory nature of the crime that gave him pause, for he was as familiar with scenes of carnage as a butcher and blood no longer made him squeamish. That Martin Orr, the celebrated little Fifth Avenue curio dealer whose establishment was a treasure-house of authentic rarities, had had his shiny little bald head bashed to red ruin—this was

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an indifferent if practical detail; the bludgeon, a heavy paperweight spattered with blood but wiped clean of fingerprints, lay not far from the body, so *that* much was clear. No, it was not the assault on Orr that opened their eyes, but what Orr had apparently done as he lay gasping out his life on the cold cement floor of his shop, *after* the assault.

The reconstruction of events after Orr's assailant had fled the shop, leaving the curio dealer for dead, seemed perfectly legible: having been struck down in the main chamber of his establishment, toward the rear, Martin Orr had dragged his broken body six feet along a counter—the red trail told the story plainly—had by superhuman effort raised himself to a case of precious and semi-precious stones, had smashed the thin glass with a feeble fist, had groped about among the gem-trays, grasped a large unset amethyst, fallen back to the floor with the stone tightly clutched in his left hand, had then crawled on a tangent five feet past a table of antique clocks to a stone pedestal, raised himself again, and deliberately dragged off the pedestal the object it supported—an old clock with a glass dome over it—so that the clock fell to the floor by his side, shattering its fragile case into a thousand pieces. And there Martin Orr had died, in his left fist the amethyst, his bleeding right hand resting on the clock as if in benediction.

By some miracle, the clock's machinery had not been injured by the fall. It had been one of Martin Orr's fetishes to keep all his magnificent timepieces running, and to the bewildered ears of the little knot of men surrounding Martin Orr's corpse that grey Sunday morning came the pleasant *tick-tick-tick* of the no longer glass-domed clock.

Weird? It was insane!

"There ought to be a law against it," growled Sergeant Velie.

Dr. Samuel Prouty, Assistant Medical Examiner of New York County, rose from his examination of the body and prodded Martin Orr's dead buttocks—the curio dealer was lying face down—with his foot.

"Now here's an old coot," he said grumpily, "sixty if he's a day, with more real stamina than many a youngster. Marvelous powers of resistance! He took a fearful beating about the head and shoulders, his assailant left him for dead, and the old monkey clung to life long enough to make a tour about the place! Many a younger man would have died in his tracks."

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"Your professional admiration leaves me cold," said Ellery. He had been awakened out of a pleasantly warm bed not a half hour before to find Djuna, the Queens' gypsy boy-of-all-work, shaking him. The Inspector had already gone, leaving word for Ellery, if he should be so minded, to follow. Ellery was always so minded when his nose sniffed crime, but he had not had breakfast and he was thoroughly out of temper. So his taxicab had rushed through Fifth Avenue to Martin Orr's shop, and he had found the Inspector and Sergeant Velie already on the cluttered scene interrogating a grief-stunned old woman—Martin Orr's aged widow—and a badly frightened Slavic giant who introduced himself in garbled English as the "ex-Duke Paul."

The ex-Duke Paul, it developed, had been one of Nicholas Romanov's innumerable cousins caught in the whirlpool of the Russian Revolution who had managed to flee the homeland and was eking out a none-too-fastidious living in New York as a sort of social curiosity. This was in 1926, when royal Russian expatriates were still something of a novelty in the land of democracy. As Ellery pointed out much later, this was not only 1926, but precisely Sunday, March the seventh, 1926, although at the time it seemed ridiculous to consider the specific date of any importance whatever.

"Who found the body?" demanded Ellery, puffing at his first cigarette of the day.

"His nibs here," said Sergeant Velie, hunching his colossal shoulders. "*And* the lady. Seems like the Dook or whatever he is has been workin' a racket—been a kind of stooge for the old duck that was murdered. Orr used to give him commissions on the customers he brought in—and I understand he brought in plenty. Anyway, Mrs. Orr here got sort of worried when her hubby didn't come home last night from the poker game."

"Poker game?"

The Russian's dark face lighted up. "Yuss. Yuss. It is remarkable game. I have learned it since my sojourn in your so amazing country. Meester Orr, myself, and some others play here each week. Yuss." His face fell, and some of his fright returned. He looked fleetingly at the corpse and began to edge away.

"You played last night?" asked Ellery in a savage voice.

The Russian nodded. Inspector Queen said: "We're rounding 'em up. It seems that Orr, the Duke, and four other men had a sort of poker club, and met in Orr's back room there every Saturday night and played till all hours. Looked over that back room, but there's

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nothing there except the cards and chips. When Orr didn't come home, Mrs. Orr got frightened and called up the Duke—he lives at some squirty little hotel in the Forties—the Duke called for her, they came down here this morning. This is what they found." The Inspector eyed Martin Orr's corpse and the debris of glass surrounding him with gloom, almost with resentment. "Crazy, isn't it?"

Ellery glanced at Mrs. Orr. She was leaning against a counter, frozen-faced, tearless, staring down at her husband's body as if she couldn't believe her eyes. Actually, there was little to see: Dr. Prouty had flung outspread sheets of a Sunday newspaper over the body and only the left hand—still clutching the amethyst—was visible.

"Unbelievably so," said Ellery drily. "I suppose there's a desk in the back room where Orr kept his accounts?"

"Sure."

"Any paper on Orr's body?"

"Paper?" repeated the Inspector in bewilderment. "Why, no."

"Pencil or pen?"

"No. Why, for heaven's sake?"

Before Ellery could reply, a little old man with a face like wrinkled brown papyrus pushed past a detective at the front door—he walked like a man in a dream. His gaze fixed on the shapeless bulk and the bloodstains. Then, incredibly, he blinked four times and began to cry. His wizened frame jerked with sobs. Mrs. Orr awoke from her trance. She cried, "Oh, Sam, Sam!" and, putting her arms around the newcomer's racked shoulders, began to weep with him.

Ellery and the Inspector looked at each other and Sergeant Velie belched his disgust. Then the Inspector grasped the crying man's little arm and shook him. "Here, stop that!" he said gruffly. "Who are you?"

The man raised his tear-stained face from Mrs. Orr's shoulder and blubbered: "S-Sam Mingo, S-Sam Mingo, Mr. Orr's assistant. Who—who— Oh, I can't believe it!" and he buried his face in Mrs. Orr's shoulder again.

"Got to let him cry himself out, I guess," said the Inspector, shrugging. "Ellery, what the deuce do you make of it? I'm stymied."

Ellery raised his eyebrows eloquently. A detective appeared in the street door escorting a pale, trembling man. "Here's Arnold Pike, Chief. Dug him out of bed just now."

Pike was a man of powerful physique and jutting jaw, but he was thoroughly unnerved and, somehow, bewildered. He fastened his eyes on the heap which represented Martin Orr's mortal remains

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and kept mechanically buttoning and unbuttoning his overcoat. The Inspector said: "I understand you and a few others played poker in the back room here last night. With Orr. What time did you break up?"

"Twelve-thirty." Pike's voice wabbled drunkenly.

"What time did you start?"

"Around eleven."

"Cripes," said Inspector Queen, "that's not a poker game, that's a game of tiddledywinks. Who killed Orr, Mr. Pike?"

Arnold Pike tore his eyes from the corpse. "God, sir, I don't know."

"You don't, hey? All friends, were you?"

"Yes. Oh, yes."

"What's your business, Mr. Pike?"

"I'm a stockbroker."

"Why—" began Ellery, and stopped. Under the urging of two detectives, three men advanced into the shop—all frightened, all exhibiting evidences of hasty awakening and hasty dressing, all fixing their eyes at once on the paper-covered bundle on the floor, the streaks of blood, the shattered glass. The three, like the incredible ex-Duke Paul, who was straight and stiff and somehow ridiculous, seemed petrified—men crushed by a sudden blow.

A small fat man with brilliant eyes muttered that he was Stanley Oxman, jeweler, Martin Orr's oldest, closest friend. He could not believe it. It was frightful, unheard of. Martin murdered!

No, he could offer no explanation. Martin had been a peculiar man, perhaps, but as far as he, Oxman, knew, the curio dealer had not had an enemy in the world. And so on, and so on, as the other two stood by, frozen, waiting their turn.

One was a lean, debauched fellow with the mark of the ex-athlete about him. His slight paunch and yellowed eyeballs could not conceal the signs of a vigorous prime. This was, said Oxman, their mutual friend, Leo Gurney, the newspaper feature-writer. The other was J. D. Vincent, said Oxman—developing an unexpected streak of talkativeness which the Inspector fanned gently—who, like Arnold Pike, was in Wall Street. "A manipulator," whatever that was. Vincent, a stocky man with the gambler's tight face, seemed incapable of speech. As for Gurney, he seemed glad that Oxman had constituted himself spokesman and kept staring at the body on the cement floor.

Ellery sighed, thought of his warm bed, put down the rebellion in his breakfastless stomach, and went to work—keeping an ear

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cocked for the Inspector's sharp questions and the halting replies. He followed the streaks of blood to the spot where Orr had ravished the case of gems. The case, its glass front smashed, little frazzled splinters framing the orifice, contained more than a dozen metal trays floored with black velvet, set in two rows. Each held scores of gems—a brilliant array of semi-precious and precious stones beautifully variegated in color. Two trays in the center of the front row attracted his eye particularly—one containing highly polished stones of red, brown, yellow, and green; the other a single variety, all of a subtranslucent quality, leek-green in color, and covered with small red spots. Ellery noted that both these trays were in direct line with the place where Orr's hand had smashed the glass case.

He went over to the trembling little assistant, Sam Mingo, who had quieted down and was standing by Mrs. Orr, clutching her hand like a child. "Mingo," he said, touching the man. Mingo started with a leap of his stringy muscles. "Don't be alarmed, Mingo. Just step over here with me for a moment."

Ellery smiled reassuringly, took the man's arm, and led him to the shattered case.

"How is it that Martin Orr bothered with such trifles as these? I see rubies here, and emeralds, but the others— Was he a jeweler as well as a curio dealer?"

Orr's assistant mumbled: "No. N-no, he was not. But he always liked the baubles. The baubles, he called them. Kept them for love. Most of them are birthstones. He sold a few. This is a complete line."

"What are those green stones with the red spots?"

"Bloodstones."

"And this tray of red, brown, yellow, and green ones?"

"All jaspers. The common ones are red, brown, and yellow. The few green ones in the tray are more valuable. The bloodstone is itself a variety of jasper. Beautiful! And—"

"Yes, yes," said Ellery hastily. "From which tray did the amethyst in Orr's hand come, Mingo?"

Mingo shivered and pointed a crinkled forefinger to a tray in the rear row, at the corner of the case.

"*All* the amethysts are kept in this one tray?"

"Yes. You can see for yourself—"

"Here!" growled the Inspector, approaching. "Mingo! I want you to look over the stock. Check everything. See if anything's been stolen."

"Yes, sir," said Orr's assistant timidly, and began to potter about

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the shop with lagging steps. Ellery looked about. The door to the back room was twenty-five feet from the spot where Orr had been assaulted. No desk in the shop itself, he observed, no paper around.

"Well, son," said the Inspector in troubled tones, "it looks as if we're on the trail of something. I don't like it. Finally dragged it out of these birds. I *thought* it was funny, this business of breaking up a weekly Saturday-night poker game at half-past twelve. They had a fight!"

"Who engaged in fisticuffs with whom?"

"Oh, don't be funny. It's this Pike feller, the stockbroker. Seems they all had something to drink during the game. They played stud, and Orr, with an ace-king-queen-jack showing, raised the roof off the play. Everybody dropped out except Pike; he had three sixes. Well, Orr gave it everything he had and when Pike threw his cards away on a big over-raise, Orr cackled, showed his hole-card—a deuce!—and raked in the pot. Pike, who'd lost his pile on the hand, began to grumble; he and Orr had words—you know how those things start. They were all pie-eyed, anyway, says the Duke. Almost a fistfight. The others interfered, but it broke up the game."

"They all left together?"

"Yes. Orr stayed behind to clean up the mess in the back room. The five others went out together and separated a few blocks away. Any one of 'em could have come back and pulled off the job before Orr shut up shop."

"And what does Pike say?"

"What the deuce would you expect him to say? That he went right home and to bed, of course."

"The others?"

"They deny any knowledge of what happened after they left here last night. Well, Mingo? Anything missing?"

Mingo said helplessly: "Everything seems all right."

"I thought so," said the Inspector with satisfaction. "This is a grudge kill, son. Well, I want to talk to these fellers some more. What's eating you?"

Ellery lighted a cigarette. "A few random thoughts. Have you decided in your own mind why Orr dragged himself about the shop when he was three-quarters dead, broke the glass-domed clock, and pulled an amethyst out of the gem-case?"

"That," said the Inspector, the troubled look returning, "is what I'm all foggy about. I can't— 'Scuse me." He returned hastily to the waiting group of men.

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Ellery took Mingo's lax arm. "Get a grip on yourself, man. I want you to look at that smashed clock for a moment. Don't be afraid of Orr—dead men don't bite, Mingo." He pushed the little assistant toward the paper-covered corpse. "Now tell me something about that clock. Has it a history?"

"Not much of one. It's a h-hundred and sixty-nine years old. Not especially valuable. Curious piece because of the glass dome over it. Happens to be the only glass-domed clock we have. That's all."

Ellery polished the lenses of his pince-nez, set the glasses firmly on his nose, and bent over to examine the fallen clock. It had a black wooden base, circular, about nine inches deep, and scarified with age. On this the clock was set—ticking away cozily. The dome of glass had fitted into a groove around the top of the black base, sheathing the clock completely. With the dome unshattered, the entire piece must have stood about two feet high.

Ellery rose, and his lean face was thoughtful. Mingo looked at him in a sort of stupid anxiety. "Did Pike, Oxman, Vincent, Gurney, or Paul ever own this piece?"

Mingo shook his head. "No, sir. We've had it for many years. We couldn't get rid of it. Certainly *those* gentlemen didn't want it."

"Then none of the five ever tried to purchase the clock?"

"Of course not."

"Admirable," said Ellery. "Thank you." Mingo felt that he had been dismissed—he hesitated, shuffled his feet, and finally went over to the silent widow and stood by her side. Ellery knelt on the cement floor and with difficulty loosened the grip of the dead man's fingers about the amethyst. He saw that the stone was a clear glowing purple in color, shook his head as if in perplexity, and rose.

Vincent, the stocky Wall Street gambler with the tight face, was saying to the Inspector in a rusty voice: "I can't see why you suspect any of us. Pike particularly. What's in a little quarrel? We've always been good friends, all of us. Last night we were pickled—"

"Sure," said the Inspector gently. "Last night you were pickled. A drunk sort of forgets himself at times, Vincent. Liquor affects a man's morals as well as his head."

"Nuts!" said the yellow-eyeballed Gurney suddenly. "Stop sleuthing, Inspector. You're barking up the wrong tree. Vincent's right. We're all friends. It was Pike's birthday last week." Ellery stood very still. "We all sent him gifts. Had a celebration, and Orr was the cockiest of us all. Does that look like the preparation for a payoff?"

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Ellery stepped forward and his eyes were shining. All his temper had fled by now, and his nostrils were quivering with the scent of the chase. "And when was this celebration held, gentlemen?" he asked softly.

Stanley Oxman puffed out his cheeks. "Now they're going to suspect a birthday blowout! Last Monday—this past Monday. What of it?"

"This past Monday," said Ellery. "How nice. Mr. Pike, your gifts—"

"For God's sake." Pike's eyes were tortured.

"When did you receive them?"

"After the party, during the week. The boys sent them up to me. I didn't see any of them until last night, at the poker game."

The others nodded their heads in concert. The Inspector was looking at Ellery with puzzlement. Ellery grinned, adjusted his pince-nez, and spoke to his father aside. The weight of the Inspector's puzzlement, if his face was a scale, increased. But he said quietly to the white-haired broker: "Mr. Pike, you're going to take a little trip with Mr. Queen and Sergeant Velie. Just for a few moments. The others of you stay here with me. Mr. Pike, please remember not to try anything—foolish."

Pike was incapable of speech—his head twitched sidewise and he buttoned his coat for the twentieth time. Nobody said anything. Sergeant Velie took Pike's arm and Ellery preceded them into the early-morning peace of Fifth Avenue. On the sidewalk he asked Pike his address, the broker dreamily gave him a street and number, Ellery hailed a taxicab, and the three men were driven in silence to an apartment building a mile farther uptown.

They took a self-service elevator to the seventh floor, marched a few steps to a door, Pike fumbled with a key, and they went into his apartment.

"Let me see your gifts, please," said Ellery without expression—the first words uttered since they had stepped into the taxicab. Pike led them to a denlike room. On a table stood four boxes of different shapes and a handsome silver cup. "There," he said in a cracked voice.

Ellery went swiftly to the table. He picked up the silver cup. On it was engraved the sentimental legend:

To a True Friend
Arnold Pike
March 1, 1876, to ——
J. D. Vincent

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"Rather macabre humor, Mr. Pike," said Ellery, setting the cup down, "since Vincent has had space left for the date of your demise." Pike began to speak, then shivered and clamped his pale lips together.

Ellery removed the lid of a tiny black box. Inside, embedded in a cleft between two pieces of purple velvet, there was a man's signet-ring, a magnificent and heavy circlet, the signet of which revealed the coat-of-arms of royalist Russia. "The tattered old eagle," murmured Ellery. "Let's see what our friend the ex-Duke has to say." On a card in the box, inscribed in minute script, the following was written in French:

> To my good friend Arnold Pike on his 50th birthday. March the first ever makes me sad. I remember that day in 1917—two weeks before the Czar's abdication—the quiet, then the storm. But be merry, Arnold! Accept this signet-ring, given to me by my royal cousin, as a token of my esteem. Long life!
>
> Paul

Ellery did not comment. He restored ring and card to the box and picked up another, a large flat packet. Inside there was a gold-tipped Morocco-leather wallet. The card tucked into one of the pockets said:

"Twenty-one years of life's rattle
And men are no longer boys,
They gird their loins for the battle
And throw away their toys—
But here's a cheerful plaything
For a white-haired old mooncalf,
Who may act like any May-thing
For nine years more and a half!"

"Charming verse," chuckled Ellery. "Another misbegotten poet. Only a newspaper man would indite such nonsense. This is Gurney's?"

"Yes," muttered Pike. "It's nice, isn't it?"

"If you'll pardon me," said Ellery, "it's rotten." He threw aside the wallet and seized a larger carton. Inside there was a glittering pair of patent-leather carpet slippers. The card attached read:

> Happy Birthday, Arnold! May we all be together on as pleasant a March first to celebrate your 100th anniversary!
>
> Martin

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"A poor prophet," said Ellery drily. "And what's this?" He set the shoebox down and picked up a small flat box. In it he saw a gold-plated cigarette case, with the initials *A. P.* engraved on the lid. The accompanying card read:

> Good luck on your fiftieth birthday. I look forward to your sixtieth on March first, 1936, for another bout of whoopee!
>
> Stanley Oxman

"And Mr. Stanley Oxman," remarked Ellery, putting down the cigarette case, "was a little less sanguine than Martin Orr. His imagination reached no farther than sixty, Mr. Pike. A significant point."

"I can't see," began the broker in a stubborn little mutter, "why you have to bring my friends into it."

Sergeant Velie gripped his elbow, and he winced. Ellery shook his head disapprovingly at the man-mountain. "And now, Mr. Pike, I think we may return to Martin Orr's shop. Or, as the Sergeant might fastidiously phrase it, the scene of the crime.

"Very interesting. *Very* interesting," he added as they left the elevator downstairs. "It almost compensates for an empty belly."

"You got something?" whispered Sergeant Velie hoarsely as Pike preceded them into a taxicab.

"Cyclops," said Ellery, "all God's chillun got something. But *I* got everything."

Sergeant Velie disappeared somewhere en route to the curio shop and Arnold Pike's spirits lifted at once. Ellery eyed him quizzically. "One thing, Mr. Pike," he said as the taxicab turned into Fifth Avenue, "before we disembark. How long have you six men been acquainted?"

The broker sighed. "It's complicated. My only friend of considerable duration is Leo—Gurney, you know. Known each other for fifteen years. But then Orr and the Duke have been friends since 1918, I understand, and of course Stan Oxman and Orr have known each other—knew each other—for many years. I met Vincent about a year ago through my business affiliations and introduced him into our little clique."

"Had you yourself and the others—Oxman, Orr, Paul—been acquainted before this time two years ago?"

Pike looked puzzled. "I don't see— Why, no. I met Oxman and the Duke a year and a half ago through Orr."

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"And that," murmured Ellery, "is so perfect that I don't care if I *never* have breakfast. Here we are, Mr. Pike."

They found a glum group awaiting their return. Nothing had changed, except that Orr's body had disappeared, Dr. Prouty was gone, and some attempt at sweeping up the glass fragments of the domed clock had been made. The Inspector was in a fever of impatience, demanded to know where Sergeant Velie was and what Ellery had sought in Pike's apartment. Ellery whispered something to him and the old man looked startled. Then he dipped his fingers into his brown snuff-box and partook with grim relish.

The regal expatriate cleared his bull throat. "You have mystery re-solved?" he rumbled. "Yuss?"

"Your Highness," said Ellery gravely, "I have indeed mystery re-solved." He whirled and clapped his palms together. The men jumped. "Attention, please! Piggott," he said to a detective, "stand at that door and don't let anyone in but Sergeant Velie."

The detective nodded. Ellery studied the faces about him. If one of them was apprehensive, he had ample control of his physiognomy. They all seemed merely interested, now that the first shock of the tragedy had passed them by. Mrs. Orr clung to Mingo's fragile hand. Her eyes didn't once leave Ellery's face. The fat little jeweler, the journalist, the two Wall Street men, the Russian ex-Duke.

"An absorbing affair," grinned Ellery, "and quite elementary, despite its points of interest. Follow me closely." He went over to the counter and picked up the purple amethyst which had been clutched in the dead man's hand. He looked at it and smiled. Then he glanced at the other object on the counter—the round-based clock, with the fragments of its glass dome protruding from the circular groove.

"Consider the situation. Martin Orr, brutally beaten about the head, manages in a last desperate living action to crawl to the jewel-case on the counter, pick out this gem, then go to the stone pedestal and pull the glass-domed clock from it. Whereupon, his mysterious mission accomplished, he dies.

"Why should a dying man engage in such a baffling procedure? There can be only one general explanation. He knows his assailant and is endeavoring to leave clues to his assailant's identity." At this point the Inspector nodded, and Ellery grinned again behind the curling smoke of his cigarette.

"But such clues! Why? Well, what would you expect a dying man to do if he wished to leave behind him the name of his murderer? The answer is obvious: he would write it. But on Orr's body we find

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no paper, pen, or pencil—and no paper in the immediate vicinity. Where else might he secure writing materials? Well, you will observe that Martin Orr was assaulted at a spot twenty-five feet from the door of the back room. The distance, Orr must have felt, was too great for his failing strength. Then Orr couldn't write the name of his murderer except by the somewhat fantastic method of dipping his finger into his own blood and using the floor as a slate. Such an expedient probably didn't occur to him.

"He must have reasoned with rapidity, life ebbing out of him at every breath. Then—he crawled to the case, broke the glass, took out the amethyst. Then—he crawled to the pedestal and dragged off the glass-domed clock. Then—he died. So the amethyst and the clock were Martin Orr's bequest to the police. You can almost hear him say: 'Don't fail me. This is clear, simple, easy. Punish my murderer.' "

Mrs. Orr gasped, but the expression on her wrinkled face did not alter. Mingo began to sniffle. The others waited in total silence.

"The clock first," said Ellery lazily. "The first thing one thinks of in connection with a timepiece is time. Was Orr trying, then, by dragging the clock off the pedestal, to smash the works and, stopping the clock, so fix the time of his murder? Offhand a possibility, it is true; but if this was his purpose, it failed, because the clock didn't stop running, after all. While this circumstance does not invalidate the time-interpretation, further consideration of the whole problem does. For you five gentlemen had left Orr in a body. The time of the assault could not possibly be so checked against your return to your several residences as to point inescapably to one of you as the murderer. Orr must have realized this, if he thought of it at all. In other words, there wouldn't be any particular point to such a purpose on Orr's part.

"And there is still another—and more conclusive—consideration that invalidates the time-interpretation, and that is that Orr crawled *past* a table full of running clocks to get to this glass-domed one. If it had been time he was intending to indicate, he could have preserved his energies by stopping at this table and pulling down one of the many clocks upon it. But no—he deliberately passed that table to get to the *glass-domed* clock. So it wasn't time.

"Very well. Now, since the glass-domed clock is *the only one* of its kind in the shop, it must have been not time in the general sense but this particular timepiece in the specific sense by which Martin Orr was motivated. But what could this particular timepiece possibly

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indicate? In itself, as Mr. Mingo has informed me, it has no personal connotation with anyone connected with Orr. The idea that Orr was leaving a clue to a clockmaker is unsound; none of you gentlemen follows that delightful craft, and certainly Mr. Oxman, the jeweler, could not have been indicated when so many things in the gem-case would have served."

Oxman began to perspire. He fixed his eyes on the jewel in Ellery's hand.

"Then it wasn't a professional meaning from the clock, as a clock," continued Ellery equably, "that Orr was trying to convey. But what is there about this particular clock which is different from the other clocks in the shop?" Ellery shot his forefinger forward. "This particular clock has a glass dome over it!" He straightened slowly. "Can any of you gentlemen think of a fairly common object almost perfectly suggested by a glass-domed clock?"

No one answered, but Vincent and Pike began to lick their lips. "I see signs of intelligence," said Ellery. "Let me be more specific. What is it—I feel like Sam Lloyd!—that has a base, a glass dome, and ticking machinery inside the dome?" Still no answer. "Well," said Ellery, "I suppose I should have expected reticence. Of course, *it's a stock-ticker.*"

They stared at him, and then all eyes turned to examine the whitening faces of J. D. Vincent and Arnold Pike.

"Yes," said Ellery, "you may well gaze upon the countenances of the Messieurs Vincent and Pike. For they are the only two of our little cast who are connected with stock-tickers: Mr. Vincent is a Wall Street operator, Mr. Pike is a broker." Quietly two detectives left a wall and approached the two men.

"Whereupon," said Ellery, "we lay aside the glass-domed clock and take up this very fascinating little bauble in my hand." He held up the amethyst. "A purple amethyst—there are bluish-violet ones, you know. What could this purple amethyst have signified to Martin Orr's frantic brain?

"The obvious thing is that it is a jewel. Mr. Oxman looked disturbed a moment ago; you needn't be, sir. The jewelry significance of this amethyst is eliminated on two counts. The first is that the tray on which the amethysts lie is in a corner at the rear of the shattered case. It was necessary for Orr to reach far into the case. If it was a jewel he sought, why didn't he pick any one of the stones nearer to his palsied hand? Any single one of them would connote 'jeweler.' But, no—Orr went to the excruciating trouble of ignoring

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what was close at hand, as in the business of the clock, and deliberately selected something from an inconvenient place. Then the amethyst did not signify a jeweler, but something else.

"The second is this, Mr. Oxman: certainly Orr knew that the stock-ticker clue would not fix guilt on *one* person, for two of his cronies are connected with stocks. On the other hand, did Orr have two assailants, rather than one? Not likely. For if by the amethyst he meant to connote you, Mr. Oxman, and by the glass-domed clock he meant to connote either Mr. Pike or Mr. Vincent, he was still leaving a wabbly trail, for we still would not know whether Mr. Pike or Mr. Vincent was meant. Did he have *three* assailants, then? You see, we are already in the realm of fantasy. No, the major probability is that, since the glass-domed clock cut the possibilities down to two persons, the amethyst was meant to single out one of those two.

"How does the amethyst pin one of these gentlemen down? What significance besides the obvious one of jewelry does the amethyst suggest? Well, it is a rich purple in color. Ah, but one of your coterie fits here: His Highness the ex-Duke is certainly one born to the royal purple, even if it is an ex-ducal purple, as it were."

The soldierly Russian growled: "I am *not* Highness. You know nothing of royal address!" His dark face became suffused with blood and he broke into a volley of guttural Russian.

Ellery grinned. "Don't excite yourself—Your Grace, is it? *You* weren't meant. For if we postulate you, we again drag in a third person and leave unsettled the question of which Wall Street man Orr meant to accuse—we're no better off than before. Avaunt, royalty!

"Other possible significances? Yes. There is a species of hummingbird, for instance, known as the amethyst. Out! We have no aviarists here. For another thing, the amethyst was connected with ancient Hebrew ritual—an Orientalist told me this once—breastplate decoration of the high-priest or some such thing. Obviously inapplicable here. No, there is only one other possible application." Ellery turned to the stocky gambler. "Mr. Vincent, what is your birthdate?"

Vincent stammered: "November s-second."

"Splendid. That eliminates *you*." Ellery stopped abruptly. There was a stir at the door and Sergeant Velie barged in with a very grim face. Ellery smiled. "Well, Sergeant, was my hunch about motive correct?"

Velie said: "And how. He forged Orr's signature to a big check. Money trouble, all right. Orr hushed the matter up, paid, and said

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he'd collect from the forger. The banker doesn't even know who the forger is."

"Congratulations are in order, Sergeant. Our murderer evidently wished to evade repayment. Murders have been committed for less vital reasons."

Ellery flourished his pince-nez. "I said, Mr. Vincent, that you are eliminated. Eliminated because the only other significance of the amethyst left to us is that it is a *birthstone*. But the November birthstone is a topaz. On the other hand, Mr. Pike has just celebrated a birthday which—"

And with these words, as Pike gagged and the others broke into excited gabble, Ellery made a little sign to Sergeant Velie, and himself leaped forward. But it was not Arnold Pike who found himself in the crushing grip of Velie and staring into Ellery's amused eyes.

It was the newspaperman, Leo Gurney.

"As I said," explained Ellery later, in the privacy of the Queens' living room and after his belly had been comfortably filled with food, "this has been a ridiculously elementary problem." The Inspector toasted his stockinged feet before the fire and grunted. Sergeant Velie scratched his head.

"You don't think so? But look. It was evident, when I decided what the clues of the clock and the amethyst were intended to convey, that Arnold Pike was the man meant to be indicated. For what is the month of which the amethyst is the birthstone? *February*—in both the Polish and Jewish birthstone systems, the two almost universally recognized. Of the two men indicated by the clock-clue, Vincent was eliminated because his birthstone is a topaz. Was Pike's birthday then in February? Seemingly not, for he celebrated it—this year, 1926—in March! March first, observe. What could this mean? Only one thing: since Pike was the sole remaining possibility, then his birthday *was* in February, but on the *twenty-ninth*, on Leap Day, as it's called—and 1926 not being a Leap Year, Pike chose to celebrate his birthday on the day on which it would ordinarily fall, March first.

"But this meant that Martin Orr, to have left the amethyst, must have known Pike's birthday to be in February, since he seemingly left the February birthstone as a clue. Yet what did I find on the card accompanying Orr's gift of carpet-slippers to Pike last week? 'May we all be together on as pleasant a March first to celebrate

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your hundredth anniversary.' But if Pike is fifty years old in 1926, he was born in 1876—a Leap Year—and his hundredth anniversary would be 1976, also a Leap Year. They *wouldn't* celebrate Pike's birthday on his hundredth anniversary on March first! Then Orr didn't know Pike's real birthday was February twenty-ninth, or he would have said so on the card. He thought it was March.

"But the person who left the amethyst sign *did* know Pike's birth-month was February, since he left February's birthstone. We've just established that Martin Orr didn't know Pike's birth-month was February, but thought it was March. Therefore Martin Orr was not the one who selected the amethyst.

"Any confirmation? Yes. The birthstone for March in the Polish system is the bloodstone; in the Jewish it's the jasper. But both these stones were nearer a groping hand than the amethysts, which lay in a tray at the back of the case. In other words, whoever selected the amethyst deliberately ignored the March stones in favor of the February stone, and therefore knew that Pike was born in February, not in March. But had Orr selected a stone, it would have been bloodstone or jasper, since he believed Pike was born in March. Orr eliminated again.

"But if Orr did not select the amethyst, as I've shown, then what have we? Palpably, a frame-up. Someone arranged matters to make us believe that Orr himself had selected the amethyst and smashed the clock. You can see the murderer dragging poor Orr's dead body around, leaving the blood-trail on purpose."

Ellery sighed. "I never did believe Orr left those signs. It was all too pat, too slick, too weirdly unreal. It is conceivable that a dying man will leave one clue to his murderer's identity, but *two?*" Ellery shook his head.

"If Orr didn't leave the clues, who did? Obviously the murderer. But the clues deliberately led to Arnold Pike. Then Pike couldn't be the murderer, for certainly he wouldn't leave a trail to himself had he killed Orr.

"Who else? Well, one thing stood out. Whoever killed Orr framed Pike, and really selected that amethyst, knew Pike's birthday to be in February. Orr and Pike we have eliminated. Vincent didn't know Pike's birthday was in February, as witness his inscription on the silver cup. Nor did our friend the ex-Duke, who also wrote 'March the first' on his card. Oxman didn't—he said they'd celebrate Pike's sixtieth birthday on March first, 1936—a Leap Year, observe, when Pike's birthday would be celebrated on February twenty-ninth.

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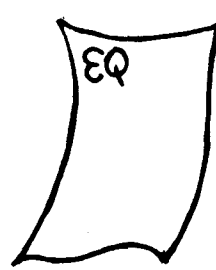
"Don't forget that we may accept these cards' evidence as valid; the cards were sent before the crime, and the crime would have no connection in the murderer's mind with Pike's five birthday cards. The flaw in the murderer's plot was that he assumed—a natural error—that Orr and perhaps the others, too, knew Pike's birthday really fell on Leap Day. And he never did see the cards which proved the others didn't know, because Pike himself told us that after the party Monday night he didn't see any of the others until last night, the night of the murder."

"I'll be fried in lard," muttered Sergeant Velie, shaking his head.

"No doubt," grinned Ellery. "But we've left someone out. How about Leo Gurney, the newspaper feature-writer? His stick o' doggerel said that Pike wouldn't reach the age of twenty-one for another nine and a half years. Interesting? Yes, and damning. For this means he considered facetiously that Pike was at the time of writing eleven and a half years old. But how is this possible, even in humorous verse? It's possible only if Gurney knew that Pike's birthday falls on February twenty-ninth, which occurs only once in four years! Fifty divided by four is twelve and a half. But since the year nineteen hundred, for some reason I've never been able to discover, was not a Leap Year, Gurney was right, and actually Pike had celebrated only 'eleven and a half' birthdays."

And Ellery drawled: "Being the only one who knew Pike's birthday to be in February, then Gurney was the only one who could have selected the amethyst. Then Gurney arranged matters to make it seem that Orr was accusing Pike. Then Gurney was the murderer of Orr.

"Simple? As a child's sum!"



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a ***NEW*** short story by

NELL LAMBURN

Never let a stranger into the house, Mother— *that's what Mr. Moffat had cautioned, insinuatingly, but Jimmy had smiled through the chained gap and she'd opened her heart and the door at once. It was a smile of such sweetness, such—well, compassion really, as if this tall thin young man with his round smooth face and light fine hair were truly sorry for her. Which was nonsense, for he couldn't possibly know that—that— Mrs. Moffat had shied away from what it was he might know and in a great fluster brought tea and cake, setting them before him in thanksgiving for his coming.*

Our first story by Nell Lamburn, "Tom's Thatch" in the July 1986 issue, placed third in the EQMM Readers Award that year. "Jimmy's Day" is another of her pitch-dark tales, its overall effect unsettling and memorable . . .

JIMMY'S DAY

by NELL LAMBURN

Mrs. Moffat awoke early. She always did. Once, before—before *here*—it had been such a favorite time. She would lie contentedly, absorbing the sounds of Merriwell Terrace: Annie Howcutt's sharp little steps passing on her way to her cleaner's job, Mr. James home from night shift, that wretched mongrel at Number 18 howling to be let in or out, young Len's car refusing to start—again. Comforting, embracing sounds that anticipated her bustling day.

But here—here there was nothing but Mr. Moffat's rasping snores mingling with the ugly coarse cawing of the rooks—a tractor perhaps, a car or two. Detached, anonymous sounds that left her more isolated than before.

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But today was different. Because today was the first Tuesday in the month. Jimmy's day. And today Jimmy was bringing Wanda to visit—for the very first time.

A flutter of anticipation, a frisson of excitement trembled through her. For Jimmy was Mrs. Moffat's secret. Her Tuesday-once-a-month secret.

On Tuesdays, Mr. Moffat drove the twelve miles to Salisbury market and never returned before six o'clock in the evening. At five minutes to, she would open the kitchen door to hear the engine's faint burr sawing the suffocating silence of the valley. Then she'd slam the door quickly and dart about to ensure there was no trace of Jimmy's visit.

There was always vanilla sponge cake for tea on the first Tuesday of the month, sandwiched with thick pale butter cream and topped with a fine snow of icing sugar. Jimmy liked white things, clean things. For cleanliness was his passion, his mission, as he carried the Fresh-O word through the villages: delivered the Watchtower of Cleanliness, dispensed the sacrament of polish and bleach, disinfectant and scourers to the heathen housewives.

And of all those housewives, Mrs. Moffat was the most devoted of acolytes, the Fresh-O catalogue her secret Bible hid safe beneath her sensible underclothes. She would gaze, when alone, at the shiny little pictures of those products that would banish Satan dirt from her home, read avidly of the joys of cleanliness, intone—silently, lips moving—the creed of purity.

Because to believe was to ensure that Jimmy would return.

She trembled, sometimes, to think how nearly she had not opened the door to him on his first visit to the valley. She had stood, hands at her throat, heart jerking and pounding, for in the two years since their coming here she had never ever had cause to open the door to anyone. Mr. Moffat had seen to that.

But Jimmy had noted her shadow through the patterned glass panels and would not be denied.

Never let a stranger in the house, Mother—that's what Mr. Moffat had cautioned, insinuatingly, but Jimmy had smiled through the chained gap and she'd opened her heart and the door at once. It was a smile of such sweetness, such—well, compassion really, as if this tall thin young man with his round smooth face and light fine hair were truly sorry for her. Which was nonsense, for he couldn't possibly know that—that— Mrs. Moffat had shied away from what it was he

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might know and in a great fluster brought tea and cake, setting them before him in thanksgiving for his coming.

She'd watched, faint with excitement, as he ate. She'd gobbled, bite for bite, the mundane details he conveyed, for the driest bread is manna to the starving. He lived in a caravan out on the Devizes road. A mobile home he called it, but to Mrs. Moffat a caravan was a caravan. She knew those sort of parks. A white fence, a bed of geraniums, and the rent went up accordingly.

He was to be married. He told her that, too, with such tenderness that Mrs. Moffat's heart quite turned over. It had been a long time since she'd heard such a note in anyone's voice. Her name was Wanda and she'd been brought up in a Children's Home. A very *nice* Home, he assured her, but it wasn't the same as family, was it? But he was going to make that up to her—for the rest of his life.

"Oh, but isn't she *pretty!*" Mrs. Moffat had cried. "Isn't she a darling!"

And indeed so she looked in the photograph he took from his wallet. A plump little pigeon of a person, dark head on one side, smile so warm and wide that Mrs. Moffat was surprised the warmth did not exude from the photograph itself.

But Jimmy had rebuked her earnestly, as he might a child. "Prettiness isn't everything. Wanda's a *good* woman. She's pure—clean. She's without blemish in a corrupt world."

A good woman. Mrs. Moffat had drooped momentarily. It smacked of unctuousness and holier-than-thou: poke bonnets and soup-for-the-poor. Wanda looked such a *fun*-loving girl, not like Mrs. Moffat's own daughters-in-law, with their sterile careers and their sterile homes. But she did not say so. She must not upset him. At all costs, she must not upset him.

"You will come back?" anxiously, loverlike, she'd beseeched up at him and he'd reassured her, soothingly, gently, taking her hand between his.

"Of course. Look, the date is on your catalogue there. I'll come and take your order—every first Tuesday I'll come—you mustn't worry."

But she had worried: that he wouldn't come back, that Mr. Moffat wouldn't go to market, that the door would be slammed on that tantalizing vista of a forbidden world of other people's doings. The monthly visits became her lifeline, the umbilical cord of sustenance to the womb of her terrible isolation.

For people were Mrs. Moffat's passion. Once she had indulged in them as other women might indulge in hats or new shoes or cream

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cakes. She had been sustained by the minutiae of their lives, the ebb and flow of their presence at her cozy, terraced home upholstering the unyielding cushion of her marriage. Gossip was the bread of her life—not unkind, vindictive gossip, but the grain gleaned from the threshing floor of every day.

"Ask Daisy Moffat, Mrs. M. will know." "Let's tell Daisy—Daisy Moffat knows everything, everyone."

High Priestess of the Old Town, fount of all local knowledge.

Until Mr. Moffat had snapped off that life as easily and brutally as he might have snapped a twig.

For Mr. Moffat did not care for people. Not at all. Mrs. Moffat's mother had seen it, forty years ago, and warned querulously, "You'll lose your friends, Daisy—he'll put you in a cage, those possessive sort always do."

But Mrs. Moffat, much taken with the reserved, good-looking young printer, so *different* from her other beaux, had tossed her head and married him. Flattered, really, that he wanted her all to himself.

She hadn't given in easily. In fact, believing that the hardest stone must eventually wear away, she hadn't given in at all, oblivious to Mr. Moffat's resentment against these people who trespassed into his home and consumed his wife's attention which should rightly be his. She'd never guessed how that resentment swelled until it seemed sometimes as if it might actually burst his very skin. How it pervaded his brain, clogging his tongue, dulling his eye so that only on the noisy terrace of Saturday-afternoon football matches or watching the slim crimson float dip and bob on the shiny Sunday surface of the canal had he been free of it.

The boys came with him then. "*My* boys," Mrs. Moffat called them, but without conviction for indeed they were Mr. Moffat's boys, as reserved, even-featured, and uncommunicative as he. Often, watching their secret eyes, she wondered if there was anything of her in them at all, whether she had been no more than the disposable casing for their incubation. When they left home to work in jobs whose technology confused her, it seemed that photographic images were all they left of themselves and it scared her that perhaps she, too, might become no more than a framed face on a mantelpiece.

Then she would panic, try to divert her husband with gossip and anecdotes, outings and gatherings, like some middle-aged Scheherazade, fearful of some unguessed-at dawn.

The Sunday after Mr. Moffat's sixtieth birthday, he'd invited his wife for a drive. Mrs. Moffat had been quite flustered with surprise.

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It had been a long time—indeed, she couldn't remember when—since he had done such a thing. But as they'd left the shelter belt of industrial estates and the raw new housing, uneasiness had touched her, as it does an animal which strays too far from its territory. For she wasn't a one for the country and never had been. Where were they going? she wanted to know. How far was it? How long before they returned? But he would not tell her, only drummed his fingers lightly on the steering wheel and bulged his cheek with his tongue.

Five rivers pour into Salisbury and it was into the deepest and most remote of their valleys that, after an hour and a half, Mr. Moffat turned the car. Mrs. Moffat had stared in increasing alarm at the steep, sheep-strewn fields, the beech clumps charred and blackened by winter, the intermittent, seemingly deserted damp hamlets. Her lower lip had begun to tremble, as a child's does.

"I want to go home!" she'd complained and Mr. Moffat had begun to laugh: a rich, belly-shaking laugh that she had never heard before. She'd cringed from him, alarm spinning into real fear.

He'd slowed the car, turning into a rough lane that burrowed up into the hillside, so narrow that the hubcaps brushed the coarse-grassed banks. A bungalow lay up on the left and Mr. Moffat edged the car through the gateway, switched off the engine, and sighed a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Well," he'd said, pleased. "And here we are, then!"

Mrs. Moffat had stared fearfully at the vacant picture windows, the terraces of blank lawn imprisoned by thorn hedges, the trees that held out their huge naked branches menacingly toward the chimneyless roof. The almost tangible solitude. There was not another house in sight.

She'd begun to cry, bewildered, fearful of she knew not what. "I want to go *home!* Take me *home!*"

Mr. Moffat had looked at her then, letting his eyes take in the full measure of her distress. It was the apogee of his plan. "You *are* home, Mother," he'd said softly. "This is our new home. We're not going back to Merriwell Terrace. Not ever again. I've sold it to Len Fox from work—it doesn't belong to us any more."

It had astonished him how long it had taken her to understand what he'd said. It had afforded him, however, the opportunity to explain The Plan, as he liked to think of it, in every detail, and with each telling it increased in cleverness. How he'd negotiated early retirement and encouraged Len Fox's desire to buy the house. Len's amiable agreement to secrecy. The solicitor's bewilderment at the

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confidentiality until Mr. Moffat had explained: "She's set her heart on a move, you see—it's going to be a surprise for her!"

But Mrs. Moffat had not appreciated the cleverness of it and sobbed and howled and beat her fists on Mr. Moffat's becardiganed chest and ran about the garden, tripping and stumbling, quite drunk with the shock.

With forethought, Mr. Moffat had purchased the minimum of furnishings from the vendors and really they were quite comfortable until their own belongings arrived three days later. But Mrs. Moffat had taken no interest in their arranging, drifting about the rooms in silent distress, her mouth agape, her hair awry, frightened to death to go outside, as if the isolation were a tangible beast that might devour her. She did not, in fact, need to go out. She could not drive. The hamlet, a mile away, had no shop. And when the vicar of five villages called, in half hearted hope that two more might be added to his miserable congregation, he smelled defeat even before Mr. Moffat's explanation that poor health would preclude their attendance.

There was no telephone. An unnecessary expense, Mr. Moffat assured her, sucking in his cheeks. *Real* friends would *call*. But for some reason or other, no one ever came. Despite the beseeching letters she gave Mr. Moffat to post. Only the boys drove down occasionally, with their shiny, clever wives whose brittle chatter, like hailstones on the tin roof of her unhappiness, drowned her cries.

But Mr. Moffat wasn't an unreasonable man, he told himself. After a few weeks, they drove together to Salisbury market, where she must do the week's shopping and woe betide her if she forgot even one item. The unaccustomed press of people upset her. Once she thought she saw the Elliotts from Number 60 Merriwell Terrace, but they were strangers who turned, startled and embarrassed, and Mr. Moffat, when he caught up with her, tucked her arm a little too tightly through his and shook his head in muted disapproval, as if she might actually have been trying to run away.

But running away requires a destination and Mrs. Moffat's world was empty of horizons.

Until Jimmy came.

Mrs. Moffat did not care to look at her husband as she eased herself from the bed. She rarely did these days, unless she must. The fine features she'd once admired had, since his retirement, be-

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come blurred in the roseate flesh that pouched his eyes so that the lashes stood erect, like dead rushes about dull pools.

She made his tea, just as she always did. Two lumps, stirred three times only. He was very insistent on that as he was with the countless small domestic routines that secured her now in an alien subservience, as Gulliver had been secured by a myriad Lilliputian thongs.

She opened the flowered curtains and set down the cup. But today he did not yawn and clack his teeth and hawk the phlegm that his snores had gouged up from his throat.

Because, when she brought herself to look at him, she knew—she'd seen her father thus—that he had suffered a stroke.

She stared down at the twisted mouth, the unseeing eyes, the horrid flush, and began to tremble. Anger—slow, terrible—suffused her.

He had chosen Tuesday, of all the days of the week. And of all the Tuesdays in the month, he had chosen the first.

There would be doctors, an ambulance perhaps. She might have to go with him. Jimmy would come and she'd not be here! She'd not meet Wanda! He might be hurt and upset, think she didn't care—not come again!

Panic chased her down the narrow corridor to the kitchen. Like some small animal conditioned to its cage, the imminent distortion of the limits of her confinement confused her.

Tonight—she could find a doctor tonight. Rest was the important thing with strokes. Let him lie quiet—he'd be the better for it—likely he'd be himself tonight—

"There—there, that's right, you just rest." Back upstairs, she stood a yard from the bed and nodded at the billowing cheeks, smiled encouragingly into his unfocussing eyes. And power, like the first promised warmth of the summer's sun, loosened the fibers of her being. Closing the door behind her, she turned the key and slipped it into her pocket. Didn't want him stumbling about and hurting himself, did they? Nothing must spoil today.

She meant to go back, she really did, but somehow what with making the cake and cleaning the kitchen yet once again and wrapping the white china angel, she quite quite forgot all about it.

The angel was her present, you see. Her *wedding* present.

"Knickknacks—poof! What d'you want with more *knick*knacks?" Mr. Moffat had scoffed, but she'd bought it from the market stall just the same, her eyes secret. It wasn't one of your thin, pious

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angels, you see, soulful and sanctimonious, but a rather plump, jolly, twinkling angel, kneeling, hands pressed together, head slightly tilted as if she were waiting eagerly for Our Lord's next command.

And it had reminded her, at once, of Wanda.

Jimmy saw it, too, the moment they unwrapped the pretty pink paper with the silver bells and bows. He cradled the little figure in his hands and his eyes glowed amber brown.

"Why, she *is* my angel—my *per*fect angel!" He said it so solemnly, so unaffectedly, that Mrs. Moffat's eyes blurred with tears.

And Wanda smiled, laying her head against his shoulder in such an artless, loving gesture that Mrs. Moffat's heart quite turned over. She felt privileged, honored, to be part of their loving courtship.

Wanda sighed. "Jimmy says you've been *ever* so kind to him, Mrs. Moffat. He really looks forward to calling here. He says you're his very favorite customer—so *in*terested in everything and all. You really understand how he feels—things being clean and all that."

Mrs. Moffat thought her heart would bound from her very body in delight. And fear. For the bedroom key pressed against her thin thigh, out of all proportion to its weight: the ugly, sickening image of the distorted face pressed into her mind. Whatever would Jimmy say if he could see *that?*

They watched her. Jimmy's smile so warm, so compassionate, so—so *deep*, as if he knew everything! Oh, to take their hands and lead them to the room and lay the burden of Mr. Moffat on them: on their youth and zeal and mercy.

But fear checked her. Of Jimmy's righteous disgust. Of delivering them into Mr. Moffat's knowledge. They were *her* secret. Loosed into his awareness, he might, when he recovered, savage them to extinction from her life.

So she dipped her eyes and cut another slice of cake and said, with the fervor of the converted, "Oh, yes, I *do* understand. I really do."

When they had gone—"Not next month, Mrs. Moffat, we'll be on our honeymoon next month"—she ventured down to the corner of the property for the very first time on her own. And for the very first time, too, the valley did not threaten her.

They did not keep him long in hospital. He couldn't speak or feed himself but he could manage a few hobbling steps and it was so much better for him to be at home, don't you know. Nurse would come once a week—twice if you need her, dear. Well, so long as it

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wasn't Tuesdays she didn't mind. They brought a wheelchair and connected the telephone and told her the market bus would stop for her at the end of the lane at 9:15 sharp on Saturday mornings. (Mr. Moffat hadn't told her about the bus.) And they said she was very brave, very courageous, and how lucky Mr. Moffat was to have such a devoted wife.

The Vicar took to calling, but Mr. Moffat's glottal fury backed him, servilely, from the lounge to the haven of paste sandwiches and chocolate cake in the kitchen, and Mrs. Moffat's assurances that he was best left alone—"Visitors upset him, Vicar"—and her flattering, insatiable interest in the parish doings.

The boys came, of course they did. But they were ill at ease, something Mrs. Moffat observed as quite curious, for they'd talked little amongst each other before. Now, when unable to communicate, they beamed and spoke loudly and slowly as if their father were deaf, too, about things he wasn't interested in, and Mrs. Moffat wondered at his rage.

Their wives cringed from the drooling spittle and mottled skin and swallowed their cake with difficulty and angled their glances, in surreptitious anticipation of departure, at the elegant watches on their bony wrists.

The boys brought a television set. But Mrs. Moffat, custodian of the remote-control panel, found herself easily bored by the sport he enjoyed. Sitcoms and soap operas—so much more entertaining for you, dear. Though Mr. Moffat did not appear convinced.

She was careful to cook him all his favorite foods, steak and hot chips and cream meringues—to tempt him, she justified it—and if most fell, sparsely chewed, from his twisted mouth and as the weeks passed the flesh began to droop from his frame, it wasn't her fault, was it? She only wanted to please him, after all, to give him what he wanted.

While on the prettily decorated dairy calendar in the kitchen she crossed off each date, day by day, as a lover might, and searched, in intense anticipation, her cookery books for a very special cake: an offering that would be fit for the Second Coming.

But Jimmy did not come.

Nurse said briskly, on her Friday visit:

"Oh *dear*, Mrs. M., you *have* let things go—how long's Mr. Moffat been sitting there, then? Is it all getting too much for you, dear? Is that it? No one would blame you—you've been splendid. Doctor

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thinks the *world* of you—so brave and loyal, he says—but you mustn't make *yourself* ill, dear, Mr. Moffat wouldn't like that. There are ever such nice Homes in Salisbury. You could be there together, you could still care for him.

"There, that's better—all nice and clean now. Don't forget to pop the washing in the dryer. Shut the windows, it's ever so cold outside. Have that nice mince I've cooked—steak isn't good, dear, he can't chew it. I'm off on my hols tonight or I'd come in Monday—but Nurse Greening will come next Friday. You'll ring Doctor, won't you, if you're poorly—if you can't cope? Remember what I said about a Home. Have a think about it, dear—it makes sense, you know."

A Home. If they went to a Home, she'd not see Jimmy and Wanda again. A Home wouldn't buy Fresh-O. There'd be no more first-Tuesdays-of-the-month in a Home. Because, of course, he would call here again.

Wouldn't he?

The terrible lethargy that had paralyzed her since Tuesday began to melt in the hot fire of fear.

Wouldn't he?

Suddenly, in that moment, blindingly, Mrs. Moffat recognized Jimmy for what he really was. Jimmy was love. Sustaining, enriching a life grown almost unbearable in its barrenness: love that had beflowered the desert of her existence. A love she could not—must not—lose.

"Mrs. Moffat! Why, Mrs. *Moffat!*" The caravan door opened and shut, quick as a frog's tongue. "Now here's a surprise!"

It was chill and airless inside, but so neat. So clean. Even the air smelt of cleanliness.

"You didn't come—" Silently she pleaded for him to understand. "I was ever so worried. I thought—" Her voice tailed, awkward, a little breathless. It had taken her three bus journeys and half a day to reach the park and all at once she felt very tired, rather foolish. But Jimmy smiled his gentle smile and spread his hands.

"What did you think, Mrs. Moffat?"

She ducked her glance and turned her head from his compassion—and the china angel, *her* angel, gazed back at her from the shelf beneath the curtained window.

"I thought—" Her fears, nebulous, unsubstantial, refused to take form. "An accident—illness. You've never missed before— But you really are all right?"

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He nodded, his eyes velvety. She'd never noticed before how velvety they were: pansy petals.

"And Wanda?" Her hands clasped, braver now. "Is Wanda all right, too?"

"She is—now she is." And he sighed. "We've had such trouble, you see, such upsets—"

All because of the wedding photograph, the one in the local paper. He brought it out and Mrs. Moffat, not understanding, stared down at the laughing happy face, crowned with flowers, framed in soft gauzy veiling.

Wanda's mother, he explained—the mother she'd never known—had seen it and in two short weeks Wanda had acquired both husband and parent!

"It was an emotional time. A *very* emotional time." Jimmy closed the album on his knees and spread his hands flat upon it. "I didn't blame her. How could I? She was my angel, my perfect angel."

The woman drank heavily but Wanda defended her. She'd had such a *sad* life, abandoned by Wanda's father, penniless, forced to place her child in the Home. They must be kind, forgive—

" 'You have so much—I have nothing, nothing but my Wanda,' that's what she whined. Constantly. But she was *my* Wanda—*my wife*—and every evening the woman would be here as if it was her right." He frowned, his hands turning, palms up. They were, Mrs. Moffat noticed, very pale. "I didn't blame Wanda, you must understand that. I *couldn't* blame her, could I?"

Suddenly Mrs. Moffat's heart began to bump and flutter. She wished—she didn't know why—that she hadn't come. She didn't want to hear any more. She didn't want to know what had happened. She wanted to hurry from this airless, sterile, chill place: she wanted to go home. To the bungalow she'd never thought of as home before—to the trapped old man she'd wed forty years ago.

Jimmy frowned, as if he knew and was displeased, and it made her heart bump and flutter even more. He leaned a little forward. "It couldn't go on. Wanda saw that it couldn't. The woman became angry, abusive. She said a lot of things—*dirty* things. I wanted her out." He shuddered as if the memory of the scene still seared him. "That's when she told Wanda who her father was."

Paralyzed, Mrs. Moffat could only wait, her mouth agape, as if to catch and swallow his very words.

Another shudder shook his long body. "Her *uncle*—her mother's brother." The hands trembled, the velvet of his eyes glistened wetly.

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"My Wanda, my angel, the child of *incest*. Soiled. Unclean. Oh, how she wept then—how we both wept. She had betrayed me—"

"But it wasn't *her* fault!" Mrs. Moffat cried out through suffocating shock.

He looked at her, almost kindly. "The sins of the father, Mrs. Moffat—the sins of the father. She was soiled. Right through. She held that little angel there, weeping and crying that she was no longer like her."

Mrs. Moffat's hands clasped beseechingly. "But you comforted her, Jimmy. You loved her. You told her you loved her despite—despite—She's your wife—"

Old sick husband trapped helpless in his wheelchair, waiting for her, not knowing where she was: locked in. Where had *her* compassion gone, then?

He looked at her sternly. "How *could* I comfort her? She was soiled and unclean, Mrs. Moffat."

Was.

"Oh, Jimmy—she hasn't left you, has she?" Love for him burst through her distress.

"*No*—I could never let that happen! She's here with us now—always."

There was only one closed door. Opening it was the stupidest thing Mrs. Moffat ever did in all her life.

Wanda lay on the bed that cramped the tiny room, her palms pressed together as if in prayer upon her breast. Her face was as white as the long nightdress that clothed her, for all the world like a sleeping angel.

Only Mrs. Moffat knew, as fear liquefied her very bones, that Wanda was not sleeping.

"The bleach—it made her clean, like that angel." Jimmy's soft voice, so reasonable, so convincing, murmured through the screaming in her head. "White all through—pure, cleansed, my perfect angel again. That's what she wanted."

But Mrs. Moffat knew otherwise. Not Wanda. Not that warm, loving little body—those dark, fun-loving eyes. She'd never chose that way. Unless—

Terror—terror of what she half guessed had happened here—spiked through her. She closed her eyes. Her voice, fragile as a dead leaf, trembled on the bending bough of her reason.

"I must go home, Jimmy. Mr. Moffat is waiting for me."

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He didn't answer.

She must turn at last. He was framed by the doorway to the kitchenette. Behind him, on the ledges and the shelves, the Fresh-O products gleamed like icons, brilliant in their crimsons and azures and whites.

"Ah, Mrs. Moffat, I thought that you of *all* people would understand!" His face was full of compassionate sorrow, as if her thoughts had sinned grievously, but Mrs. Moffat did not see. She saw only the white cup cradled between his palms, as a minister cradles the chalice. "Now drink—Mr. Moffat will wait."

And wait. And wait. And wait.

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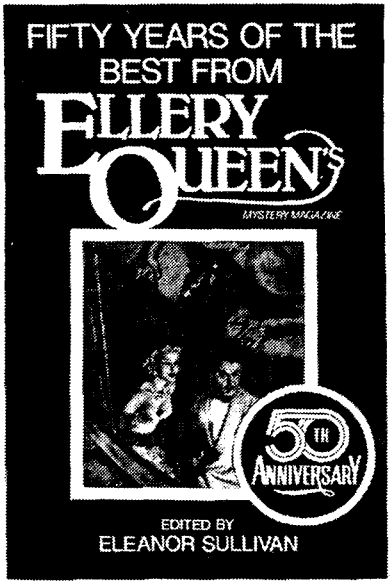

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a *NEW* Griswold story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Jennings was expressing his puzzlement that in this modern world it is still possible for people to disappear. "I don't mean people like James Hoffa, who were probably killed and disposed of. I mean children who vanish. It seems to me that, with modern techniques, they should be findable."

"Sometimes it's an adult who has disappeared, and a very important one, too," interrupted Griswold. "And he can't be found. Unless, of course, the searcher has the elementary good sense to come to me . . ."

A SAFE PLACE

by ISAAC ASIMOV

I was telling a joke, something that is not often done in the hallowed confines of the Union Club library. It went like this—

"Moskowitz was visiting Israel, had seen many tourist sights, and said to the taxi driver, 'Is there anything else I ought to see while you're touring me around?'

"The driver said, 'There's the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Haifa. You ought to see that.'

" 'Good,' said Moskowitz. 'Take me there.'

"And there in Haifa was a marble slab with two Israeli soldiers at parade rest. On a plain white stone, in Hebrew and in English, was written, 'Here in honored glory, known only to the Holy One, lies an Israeli soldier, Phinehas Zvi Greenbaum, who died in battle for Israel.'

"Moskowitz stared and then said, 'I don't understand. If his name is Phinehas Zvi Greenbaum, how can he be an unknown soldier who is known only to the Holy One?'

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"Whereupon the taxi driver said, 'It's very simple. As a soldier, he was unknown, but as a furrier—"

At this, Baranof and Jennings laughed satisfactorily, and then Baranof said, "I understand it's actually become difficult to find unknown soldiers in current wars. The techniques of identification have become too successful."

"That's all right," I said, "I can do without any more dead soldiers, known or unknown."

Jennings said, "What puzzles me is that in this modern world of ours it is still possible for people to disappear. I don't mean people like James Hoffa, who were probably killed and disposed of. I mean children who vanish. It seems to me that, with modern techniques, they should be findable."

"If you're unimportant—" began Baranof, but at this point Griswold came to.

He had, as usual, shown every sign of being asleep within the large winged armchair that was sacred to him, but now he came to with a rumble. (He had not laughed at my joke, by the way, though I'm sure the old fraud had heard it.) He said, "Sometimes it's an adult who has disappeared, and a very important one, too. And he can't be found. Unless, of course, the searcher has the elementary good sense to come to me, in which case—"

I said loudly, "Which reminds me of another joke. A Texan visiting Israel—"

But Griswold went on gruffly, "In which case I am quite likely to find the missing person without leaving my chair. I would not ordinarily burden you with the story I have just been reminded of, but your obvious eagerness to hear about it gives me no choice."

Abner Lorimer [said Griswold] was a good friend of mine. *Had* been a good friend, at any rate, I suppose, for this was at a time when the Department was annoyed with me and I had been cast into the outer darkness, where I was expected to spend my time gnashing my teeth. I didn't, of course. I continued to make out quite well, which annoyed the Chief no end.

It annoyed him sufficiently to put me out of bounds of all my old friends in the Department, and the Department was run with a sufficiently iron hand, you can be sure, to make that stick. It would probably have sent the Chief into a total tailspin if he had known that, from time to time, some agent would come to me to get a little

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help over a rough spot. They had to be desperate to take the chance, but sometimes they were.

Lorimer met me in a quiet motel deep in Virginia on this occasion, and told me his problem.

He had recruited someone to help out in the fight against drugs and he had done it entirely on his own—which was a mistake, of course, for if anything were to go wrong he would stand alone and defenseless to face those who would come ravening out in their search for a scapegoat.

"But he is a very good man," said Lorimer defensively. "He worked with me for some years and I have every faith in him—or had, anyway."

"Do I know him?" I asked. "What's his name?"

"You don't know him," said Lorimer emphatically, "and you're not going to know him. He's entirely my man and it's work of the highest danger that he's involved in. He infiltrates drug organizations, and each time he does it he has to have a new identity. I don't have to tell you what happens if he's ever caught, so *no* one knows his identity but me.

"He's an unnoticeable man in real life. No pronounced features or character traits about him. He lives in Maine, with a wife and young daughter, but with no other close relatives in the area, though his ancestors were connected with Maine almost since Colonial times. He has a Maine accent, not too pronounced, just to the extent that it makes him seem a country boy. He has an open face and cultivates an innocent expression that somehow led the drug people to see him as someone they could use.

"He worked in Washington and in Florida for the most part and very successfully, too. There were a number of drug busts and arrests for which I saw to it that he was properly rewarded in a very indirect way. Everything had to be done underhandedly, of course. Any publicity would have been a death sentence for him.

"His work wasn't steady. It couldn't be. He had to spend at least half the year, on and off, with his family in Orono, Maine. Two years ago, though, he moved to Portland, which is about a hundred and twenty miles southwest of Orono.

"There was nothing wrong with that in principle. In fact, I always thought he stayed in Orono too long. A shift in venue now and then is safest. You don't want to make too many close friends, too many people who investigate the cover story of your life too closely and get too suspicious.

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"He always claimed that moving would be hard on his daughter, who would have to shift schools and make new friends. Two years ago, though, he had a close call and it made him nervous—more for his family's sake than his own—so he moved to Portland. It was a far bigger city and he said he felt more anonymous and less conspicuous in a larger city.

"I didn't know where he lived in Portland, but that didn't bother me. I hadn't known exactly where he lived in Orono, either. I hadn't wanted to know. The less there was to connect us, the safer he would be. And, of course, we had our ways of contacting each other—very roundabout and safe.

"The problem now is that he's been out of touch for a couple of months and I've gotten nervous. It's not unprecedented. Sometimes it's absolutely unsafe for him to try to be in touch for a period of time, but I have my reasons to be worried about it this time."

Lorimer paused for breath and I forced a brandy on him. At that, I didn't have to force it. I said, "May I ask a few questions?"

"Of course."

"Have you tried to get in touch with him recently?"

"I've had to."

"I don't want to know the details because you'd get into trouble if you told me, but I suspect the lives of a number of people depend on this."

"A number, Griswold, and if something has gone wrong, considering that I'm running what's essentially a private project—"

"Which is completely against the rules, and completely stupid of you."

"Completely. But it's worked so far, and of course the Department may pretend they don't know about it, but they do. As long as I get results, they'll look the other way. But if something goes wrong—well, you know what would happen."

"Certainly. You'd be the patsy."

"All the way."

"So my guess is that you've tried to locate this man of yours and you've failed. But, Lorimer, what can I do about it? How can you expect me to find your man for you?"

"All I want, Griswold, is your advice, because it's worse than you think."

"In what way?"

"Well, I set up the equivalent of a search party, and first I was going to check with his wife to see if she had heard of him recently.

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Very carefully, of course. Very indirectly. I'm sure she doesn't know how he makes his good living and I had no intention of tipping his hand in this respect. So what I did—"

"Irrelevant," I said. "I know the tricks of the trade. I'll just assume you didn't find him. Go on."

Lorimer stared at me, pop-eyed. "Griswold, it's not that I didn't find him. I didn't find *her*. His wife and daughter are not in Portland. They never were. They're completely out of sight. My man never moved there in the first place."

"But he told you he did, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did."

"And you've heard from him—I mean, after he said he moved to Portland, even if you haven't heard from him in the last few months."

"Yes, yes. But the question is why did he tell me he had moved to Portland when he hadn't?"

"To lay a false trail, Lorimer, even from you. The man may be even more worried about his family than you think. He's playing a dangerous game with conscienceless killers. Did you check back in Orono?"

"Of course I did. That part is honest. He lived there. He left no forwarding address when he left, and of course he was careful to make no good friends who would be overly curious about his leaving, so I could find out nothing."

"Do you think he's dead?"

Lorimer hesitated. Then he said, "No. I think it's worse. The big question is why he lied to me and I can think of only one rational explanation. I can't believe he was laying a false trail for *me* unless he was in the process of double-crossing me. About two years ago, I think, they must have got to him—*bought* him. He decided to change sides, perhaps because he was caught and it was either that or death for himself and his family. Naturally, he has to *seem* to stay on my side if only to protect his new buddies, and he would get his family out to a safe place where the Department couldn't use it to bring counter-pressure on him. If that's the way things are, it would be *very* bad. Much of our anti-drug program would be shredded and every bit of the blame would be placed on my shoulders."

"But this is all speculation, Lorimer. You don't *know* that this has happened."

"You're right. I don't know. I *suspect*. The trouble is, I can't take the chance that I'm wrong. After all, why did he lie to me? —Help

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me, Griswold. What do I do? I need your advice. You've got that odd head on your shoulders."

"I know that. The Department would like to see it *off* my shoulders."

"Yes, but I'm not the Department, Griswold. I'm Lorimer."

I said, "I suppose, Lorimer, that what I would advise you to do is to calm down. I rather think you'll soon be hearing from your man again."

Lorimer stared at me. "How can you say that? Why did he lie to me? Tell me that."

"That part is easy, Lorimer. All I have to do is ask you one question and you don't even have to answer it. All I would need is the expression on your face. And if it's the right expression, then we have the answer."

I then asked the question, got the expression I expected in return, and that was that. All was well.

Griswold ended his story, drained his glass, wiped his white moustache with the back of his hand, and stared at us owlishly.

"One question?" said Jennings.

"Just one," said Griswold.

"What was the one question?"

"Surely you jest," said Griswold gravely.

I broke in. "Stop stalling, Griswold. What was the question?"

Griswold heaved a deep sigh. "I asked Lorimer, 'When your man told you he was moving to Portland, did he say Portland, *Maine?*'

"Lorimer's expression was enough. His man *had* moved to Portland, but he was terribly worried about his family and took them, and himself, three thousand miles west to Portland, Oregon. And he did get in touch with Lorimer soon afterward. There was no problem at all."

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

"Why'd you poison me?"

In drink you often do things you can't recall or prefer not to. But Owen wouldn't know how to buy poison or what kind, so even if partly sober he wouldn't have tried, and if drunk they wouldn't have sold it to him. Unless they were drunk, too, possible as anything is.

Robert Twohy's first fiction, "Never Anything But Trouble," was published in EQMM's Department of First Stories in 1957. Almost 35 years later, he is producing some of the freshest, most personalized work in our dramatic and demanding genre . . .

AT SCORPIANT TOWERS

by ROBERT TWOHY

Striding up a hill, Myra beside him, trim and pretty. A fine crisp day. Little ones bounce along ahead. How many—three, four? Doesn't matter—they're gone, wiped out like they never were or could be. He hears loud and brassy "HAW-HEE-HAW!" as dark swoops down and around, wind shrieks, rain slashes, the hillside turns to slime, muck, goop, soup.

Myra's gone, where? Dig in, find a perch, totter, see a rope, leap and grab it two-handed and swing out and away. Let go and drop like feather onto a stool in a fine, lowgrade dump featuring light banter, all sports on Giant Screen, fellowship. Order vodka-grape as the floor caves in. Grab the rope and swing, kick around for a fresh perch, but perch gone, no more rope, down down down, flail around but nothing to grab.

"WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP!" He's being shoved, gouged, screamed at. "FIRE IN THE BELLY, POISON!"

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Who's he in bed with? Scramble clear, grope for the bedlamp, no contact. Launch from bed and slap around on the wall till hit switch makes scrawny light, shows broken rocker, clumpy bureau with stuff hanging out, square white electric clock on it at 2:11. Meaning that he and whoever are in his snug nest at Scorpiant Towers where the clock's legs got hooked one day or night at that time and never got loose. Every three or four minutes they lunge, then slump back till their next try, which won't change anything.

A woman is thrashing around, tangled in a brown Army blanket with oilstreaks. At home they have agreeable bedware. Myra keeps the house nice and so far has met the payments from her R.N. wages. He earns no wages, hasn't for some time. Job interviews he's given up, preferring light banter in pleasant, mangy bars. He's a once and maybe nevermore high-school teacher of English, downward bound, grabbing rope, a line of drinks, which as long as there's a fresh one to grab he won't be in freefall, down down down. What's at bottom?

Hard-handed woman groans, rolls her head, grabs and pulls bunches of her face. Her hands and arms are thick and red—also the parts of her face glimpsed between grabs. Myra's trim and fair, with light-brown hair always clean with highlights. This woman's hair is dull brown and sticking up and around in greasy clusters. Her eyes are dark blue like Myra's but with a mean glint. Myra has no meanness. So this is a different woman or Myra as he's never seen her in the five years that began with ardent dreams and projects, first one the house. They bought it. Then the mule came bounding in and kicked it all apart—"HEE-HAW!"

The woman can't be Myra. This is his hideout, recovery chamber, Gulag, comedy studio where sometimes he puts on refined entertainments. Myra's never been here. Wait a sec, wait a sec—once she was churning around in this brokenback bed like now, sick and groaning, and he called Major Mersival who he'd met in some bar. Pale ascetic face with knife wounds, no hair due to Communist radiation torture maybe. Strips of black electric tape for hair and eyebrows. He came with potions that soothed.

So she's been here and this woman may be her. Gross differences but some resemblances.

A twenty-five-watt bulb seeps ghastly glow into the kitchenette. On the range are scummy pots and pans, which put in the sink full of dishes, cups, breakage, floatage, leaving on the range a coffeepot with dents, which shake and find out has some from last time here.

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Good. Burner lights. Good. Things always look better over a nice cup of coffee.

"Why'd you poison me?"

In drink you often do things you can't recall or prefer not to. But he wouldn't know how to buy poison or what kind, so if even partly sober he wouldn't have tried, and if drunk they wouldn't have sold it to him. Unless they were drunk, too, possible as anything is.

She could be joking—putting on a playlet for a little early-A.M. merriment. Why not? If that's what she's up to, he'll play.

He's gazing at his hands—broad, with lean strong fingers. When the rope runs out, they'll be on their own, grabbing for anything.

Sitting up, not hurling herself around or pulling her face, she's definitely Myra, though thick and red and with those mean eyes. But in feeble wattage he could be seeing her wrong, or mixing her up with another woman. Maybe it wasn't her when Mersival came with soothing potions, but another woman.

Bad thought comes slamming—*could this foul swamp be real, the place they live now?* Could the neat house on Maraquita Way be only a memory of where they'd lived in those sweet early days when they talked excitedly of the three, maybe four bonny little ones they'd make together, to add joy and splendor to their marriage?

Didn't happen. He went for tests, found out why not, told her. She took his hands and smiled and murmured, "We have each other. We'll adopt."

Didn't happen. He started down the booze trail.

"HAW-HEE-HAW! That's phony like everything else about you! Every drunk latches onto some excuse—I'm yours!"

"I guess." Why argue with his brother sterilite? Probably true.

She should have ended their marriage right then, but didn't, still hasn't. Why not? Pity, habit, contempt, masochism, inertia? What's at bottom when he runs out of rope? Maybe she's curious, wants to find out.

Maybe they'll find out together.

How she looks right now might not be a trick of the lousy light. She may have gradually turned into this red, hefty woman as he swung down the hill, bar to bar, oblivious.

The coffeepot is rocking and blowing steam. Find somewhat clean cup, yellow with white stripe. The coffee is hot and smoking, with an oilslick. The first cup after a binge is always a boon.

Go to her, sipping. She looks smaller, not so red. Her eyes are

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wider, softer, kinder. "Come to me, Owen. Hold me, lend me your strength."

She's the woman he loved and shared dreams with as they wended up the hill in the sunlight. He reaches to take her and the coffee goes in her face.

She screams. Her hands fly up and the near one drives into his eye. Off-balance, he's on his way over the rocker and down.

Rolling on his right hip, he hears grinding, like bones. He reaches back and pulls out pieces of a broken pencil. He hadn't realized he had pants on. Grey—also dirty green sportshirt. When drinking, clothes seem to get on and off on their own. He's barefoot.

He tosses the pencil parts, gets up, and stands up the rocker. The cup's in scattered bits. He picks up some, tosses them in a corner.

In the smeared mirror on the bureau, he watches his left eye closing. The clock's twined legs give a fretful kick, slide back to 2:11.

"The murderer stood admiring himself as his victim lay dying!"

He turns and she's as thick and red as before she'd asked for a loan of his strength. "I'll call Mersival."

"There's no such person! He's just one of your drunken figments!"

"Once he came and made you better." If the woman that time was her.

"Why d'you joke when I'm dying?"

The wallphone in the kitchen works if it does. He gets a tone. His left eye is almost closed. He doesn't know the number but lets his dialing finger go on its own.

Two rings, then a lean, supple voice. "Who calls for Mersival?"

"Owen Carrick."

"I hate him and all your sick creations!"

"Who hates Mersival?"

"Myra Carrick. Severe stomach pains unless she's—we live at Scorpiant Towers out Sludgap Row, fifth floor on the collapsing side, 66-R, east corridor."

"Zogga, fetch Meyer Carrot file, if you'll be so."

"I'm sick of your crazy routines!"

"Not Meyer Carrot, Myra Carrick. My wife."

"Thank you, Zogga. —Your last comment?"

"My wife is Myra Carrick."

"You keep iterating."

"You have Meyer Carrot's file."

"Why are you down on him?"

"I'm not."

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"I must go prepare potions. Zogga—for you."

A hard voice, sudden in his ears. "What's the squawk now?"

"None. Our address is Scorpiant Towers, fifth floor, collapsing side."

"We got that—148P, South Ward."

"Not P. *R*. As in Rope."

"You're Otis Parrot."

"No, Owen Tether."

"This is depraved and hateful and I'll play no part in it!"

His left eye is sealed shut. Myra lies quiet under the ragged grey blanket. She looks like if it was a game it's over and she's ready for sleep.

The clock lunges, slumps back. Thick black presses on the gummy windows.

Myra starts thrashing. *"Face of fire!"* In the bathroom he crouches to sort through garments and waste in and around the hamper, coming up with a not-bad dishtowel he puts under the tap. He gets a short snort of water, then air. So the water's been cut off.

He'll fan her. He comes around the rocker and puts his right foot on a chip of cup. Staggering and hopping, he's bent over her as her skull shoots up and takes the right side of his face. He goes across the rocker, which goes over and he's on his back.

"All you want is to watch me suffer!" The doorcrank creaks. He tries to scramble up, but the rocker has his ankles. The crank creaks again. Myra screams not to let him in. He twists and jerks but his ankles won't come. He shouts that he'll be there in a jif. Myra screams. Someone kicks the door. Using his shoulders, arms, and knuckles, he hunches backward on his tail, towing the rocker across the room and brief hallway to the door, which is getting kicked hard and steady and he hears wood cracking.

Twisting his spine and neck, he reaches for the knob as the door breaks open and rams the knob in his mouth.

The shock ebbs. His good eye is closing fast, but he sees a small, grim woman in a long black coat with patches of grey fur at the top and bottom and at one sleeve. Below the bottom fur are black stomper boots.

Behind and above her right shoulder is a fine-honed, ascetic face with healed knife slashes and some new ones. Electric tape is firm along the skull but the right eyebrow hangs loose. He comes around

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the woman's right. He wears a CIA jumpsuit with bayonet holes and scorchmarks.

Owen has untwisted and they're facing across the rocker. Zogga is around behind his left—he can see her boot-toes. Mersival's eyes are deep with insights and covert know-how. "Explain the state of your face."

Mouth full of blood makes it hard to form words, but he tells them how Myra bumped him twice unintendedly and the doorknob once.

Zogga snarls, "What the hell's he babbling?" Mersival shakes his head and the loose eyebrow comes free and floats. Owen asks if Zogga will help unhook his ankles.

"*Stop blubbing blood on my shoes!*" Myra shouts. "*I hate all your figments and monsters!*"

Mersival nods. "This is the place. Orrin Pease, isn't it?" Owen nods. Zogga says, "Let's see some cash." Owen tells her that in the top drawer of the bureau there may be some. "Blah-blah-blah, I'm sick of it." She has the eyebrow and sticks it on the surgeon, too high.

Mersival moves out of his view, which is down to about a quarter inch. He's in with Myra. She cries, "*I hate everything pertaining to you!*" He says leanly but not unkindly, "Gap wide those pearl-pronged mandibles, merry virgin, and soon all will be as will be."

His good eye sealed tight, Owen lies back, thinking that having done all he can for Myra he might try for some sleep.

He hears the soft hum of a vacuum and tries his right eye, which opens. So does the left. He's on the living-room couch under a light clean blue blanket, gazing at Myra in jeans and a green-striped shirt, her back view trim and pleasing. Light hair wafts to her moves. Sunlight floods in sparkling wide windows.

His mouth is sore but his fingers find it's not smashed or cut. His teeth twinge but are all there. His legs move easily. Pushing the blanket to the floor, he swings up to sitting, his bare feet on the rug. He has on only jockey shorts.

She turns, switches the thing off. Her dark-blue eyes are cool without meanness.

He asks what day it is.

"Sunday."

He touches his nose, tender and a little swollen but not bad. "How are my eyes?"

"Puffy, bloodshot." She's stacked the vacuum and comes to sit on

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the flowerprint stool near him. She leans forward, arms on her knees, her nice-shaped hands clasped. She's not a grotesque, but herself—in her own bright, clean place.

"Tell me how I was, what I did."

She says coolly, "What's the difference now?"

"Please." He wants to know all of it. He's not sure why, but he does. "When did it start?"

She shrugs. "Friday, probably. You didn't come home. Then Saturday about eleven P.M. you did. You fell, crawled to the couch, and passed out. I took off your shoes, put on the blanket, and went to bed. About two you came in the bedroom."

"Did you take off my socks?"

"You weren't wearing any."

"Maybe I sold them." She doesn't smile. He can't remember Friday, anything about his socks. Probably as well. Last night he remembers clear, nothing before. He wants her view of last night. "About two. What did I do?"

"You walked around, fell a few times. Laughed, shouted, babbled. Sat on the floor."

"What did I babble?"

She says impatiently, "What *difference* does it make?"

"Please." Sometimes after a binge they've talked, but usually not. Talks haven't cleared up anything. This time could be different. He feels on the edge of something that's been obvious all the time, every time, but he's never focused on it. "What did I babble?"

"I don't know. Once or twice you yelled, 'Mercy,' or 'Be merciful,' or something." She frowns, her mouth set. "Why go over it? It happened, it's done." She makes to get up. "D'you want coffee?"

"No, and don't go. Coffee—did I throw some on you?"

"No."

"Did I break a yellow cup?"

"No." Weary of it.

"Did you hit me once?"

"I pushed you."

"Why?"

"You came at me with a silly, simpery look, like wanting to kiss me. You slobbered on me. I pushed your face. You went down, pretended you were hit, sat on the floor."

"Did you butt me once?"

The dark-blue eyes are steady on him. "You came from the bathroom with a dishtowel in both hands, twisting it, smiling. You were

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close and your smile was—" She presses her lips together and shakes her head. "Then you stumbled—hit my head, I guess. When I looked, you were on the floor holding your face."

He had come at her twisting the towel, smiling—she was frightened and ducked, probably put her hands up. He bumped on her head and she took her hands down and saw him sitting. "What did I do then?"

"Sat with your legs crossed, hitched yourself around backward, laughed. Bumped your face once on the bookcase—on purpose it looked, not too hard. Then you lay down, sat up, laughed, babbled—finally lay down again and went to sleep."

"What did you do?"

"I slept here"—meaning the couch. "At about eight you got up and went into the bathroom, threw up I guess, took off your clothes, came back here, and lay down."

"Did you cover me?"

"The blanket was there."

"So I've been here till now."

"Yes."

He's quiet a while and so is she, not moving to get up, sitting with her shoulders back, her dark-blue eyes steady on him.

"The towel was to fan you. I had no thought of scaring you. It was comedy time, me the pratfall comic, one sick joke after another. A string of jokes, a rope of jokes."

It's clear now. He wants her to see it—she has to. "Jokes are to hide reality. But once you see it, jokes won't work any more. They were the rope and there's no more. Just reality."

He puts his hands up, edge-down palms apart, eight fingers pointing at her, thumbs touching. Sitting forward, he smiles at her over the peak of the thumbs.

She says in a flat voice, "Are you trying to scare me now?" Her sandaled feet are together, heels up. She's ready to spin and jump to either side but waits, probably thinking a quick move by her will trigger a quicker one by him. He's forward and set. She sits straight up with her eyes steady on his.

Give her more, he decides. Wiggle and curve your fingers. "Last night was your show, not mine. You set it up with the fake poison routine, got me to call Mersival, *your* creation, *your* monster, not mine. So was Zogga." It wasn't true, but it was—he'd begun this to scare her, but it's come to the truth. "You made yourself red and ugly, like you can at will, like you're doing now. Want to find the

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bottom? Me, too—let's find it together!" His smile is stretched wide and he's shouting through it. "You never forgave me and always did and still do and still hope and hang onto dead dreams, but the rope's run out and it's two-eleven and freefall, freefall!"

He's up and lunging and she's off to the right, ducking, twisting, but he'll have her games. Jokes are over and reality is his lean strong hands and her throat.

He's hopping one-footed, staggering—"HEE-HAW!"—and she's darted clear, is at the front door and out.

Which was the point of the playlet. He got caught up in his part and lost the point, but would have found it, maybe would have found it—foot-found it. It was to get her out the door and away as he freefell.

Which foot? Can't recall. Doesn't matter. He's at the door watching her run up the sunny street, trim woman he loved and loves, fair hair bouncing, past two houses and turning in at the house of her best friend Shirl—nice, as is her husband Richard, a bright, able lawyer. Turn to good neighbors in time of trouble.

He closes the door and turns the bolt. He tells his hands, "You both did good and I did a fair Jack Nicholson, with that little stumblestep at the moment of truth on purpose? I think so. It doesn't matter—we got her out."

His hands agree that they all did good and pat each other and his chest.

Sitting on the floor, he stretches his legs, then bends his knees alternately to peruse the soles of his feet. He sees no yellow chip in either, nary a spot of blood. But both soles are dirty and a fleck of cup with blood could be under the dirt. Just a fleck would feel like a spear when it hit, as last night when he came at her with the towel and hit a fleck of cup and butted his face and went down and back to the pratfall comedy, away from the reality of that moment. Just as he had done just now.

His legs stretched out, he gazes around at the dank walls and thick black pressing on gummy windows. On the bureau, the clock struggles with itself for freedom and truth.

He starts to get up, can't—his ankles are caught in the rocker. His eyes are sealed shut and he tastes a mouthful of blood.

Using his shoulders, arms, and knuckles, he hunches himself around backward at the bureau and tows the rocker to it. Twisting, he reaches and feels the clock, gives it a shove, hears *thunk* on the floor.

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"HEE-HAW?" Anxious sound.

Firmly, "No more. You were a joke I rode as far as I could. I needed you but now we separate."

"Blah-blah-blah," sounds Zogga's hard voice. "I'm sick of it."

"It's over. Mersival, are you here?"

"Open wide those slack portals, droll sterilite, and—"

"Go."

He's alone. His tailbone aches, which figures after freefall. He hears a quick, thin voice. "One more."

"One more what?"

"Joke. Me. The clock. You fixed me. I'm fancy-free and functional."

"What time is it?"

"See for yourself."

"I can't. My eyes are sealed."

"Stop it. Jokes are over. Clear out this whole morbid dreamplace you thought was so funny—Scorpiant Towers, ha ha and blah blah. Its time is gone, you're on real time now. Open your eyes and see."

He does. The clock is on the floor, face to him—2:14 and counting.

The clock is gone, and so are the stupid rocker, the lousy bed, and all the other sick junk.

He's a tall thin young man in jockey shorts, sitting on the floor in the living room of his nice house on Maraquita Way, sunlight streaming in the wide windows.

He slumps forward and holds himself and cries, and goes over on his side and cries, feeling like a fool and a child, and like a lot of rotten sick stuff is washing out of him.

After a while he goes into the bathroom and showers. He finds fresh shorts and starts to put on a nice tan shirt, then pulls it off. He'll be what he is, stripped and helpless. No defenses. That's the reality, let it show, let her see.

From bottom you can start back up. Or crawl around searching for a hole to a deeper bottom, like his father.

He puts water on a burner and spoons instant coffee into his blue mug, waits for the water.

He probably did own a yellow cup once. In college he owned a square white clock. The hands got stuck at 2:11 but it was knocked off the bureau and was all right until it died or was lost or whatever.

He carries the mug of hot coffee to the low table near the couch.

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Unlocks the front door. Picks up the blanket, folds it and puts it on the end of the couch, and sits beside it, sipping the coffee and waiting.

His father would sit in his wooden rocker and drink beer. That was the nights he was home. Most nights he was out. One night home, he got up not aware his ankles were hooked in the rungs and went straight forward and down, breaking his right shoulder and some bones in his face.

He said he wouldn't drink any more. Wrong. He had more drinking to do. Most nights he was out. One night he put his pickup in a ditch—last bottom, no more fears or defeats to drink to or away.

The door opens and it's Myra with Richard the lawyer and Shirl, his nice wife. Owen stands up, arms at his sides. Myra stands and looks at him. Richard and Shirl look. He's what he is, no defenses or camouflage, no jokes or games.

Myra comes and touches his arms and her eyes say to take and hold her. He does, like a man who wants and needs all she can give him, if she will.

Richard and Shirl are gone and the door is closed. On the couch they hold each other, young former English teacher and pretty R.N., who in the early eager days had talked about adopting, which may happen if they stay together and he does.

One day at a time is the word. Yesterdays are gone and tomorrow's unborn. This is now, this bright Sunday afternoon, just past 4:00 by the trim wallclock, counting off the first minute of the rest of their lives.

"Q"

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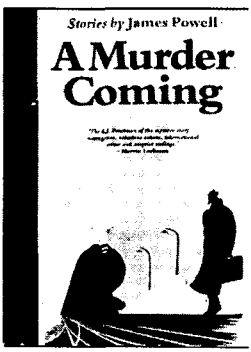

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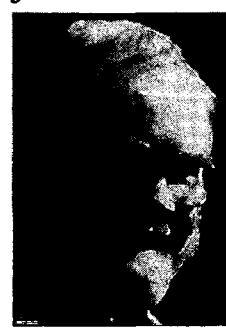

James Powell, author of A Murder Coming

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The majority of stories we receive for consideration here at EQMM embrace the idea of spouse murder. Here's an interesting variation on that theme . . .

FOR BETTER OR ELSE

by DAVID PIERCE

One of Ernie's socks. A long tubular sock with a pair of red stripes on one end. It was turned inside out so that the long, fuzzy cotton weave stuck out like sprouts from a potato in a jar of water. An inside-out sock was hardly anything to get heated about. But this particular time it was enough to cause Betty to want to kill her husband.

She grasped the neck of the sock just below the stripes and fished her hand to the bottom and pulled the toe out. Siltlike dirt sprinkled across the tops of her naked feet. *Ernie!* She let the sock fall to the floor and, from where it lay, kicked it into a pile designated to be washed next. That meant more hot water, more detergent, and double the handling time. No matter how well she sorted, a sock like this would turn up every time. *Ernie!*

Later, while folding clothes and watching *Santa Barbara*, Betty did some rough calculating, using some of the folded clothes before her to keep track of the numbers. A pair of Ernie's boxer shorts represented one hundred hours. A pair of regular briefs was only fifty hours. A washcloth was one thousand hours. A pair of pantyhose was fifty days. A T-shirt was one hundred days. And a bra represented one whole year of her life.

During the course of the average year, she'd spend an hour a day doing and redoing Ernie's socks. That'd be 365 hours a year, or roughly three shorts and a pair of briefs. If they remained married for fifty years (as she'd heard of happening), that'd come to—she moved clothing about madly, shifting, stacking, piling, grouping, and regrouping—eighteen boxer shorts or seven T-shirts and a pair of hose or, more pointedly, a little over two whole bras spent doing

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nothing but taking care of Ernie's socks! All because he couldn't turn the damned things right side out!

That was it. During a commercial break, amidst the scattered clothing representing passing moments of her life, Betty decided that Ernie had to go. And she wasn't thinking divorce, either. She picked up the telephone (after *Santa Barbara*) and called Bonnie Hedgepath. Bonnie had killed her husband, J.C., a few years earlier and had never been caught. Bonnie would help her.

Bonnie Hedgepath was a short, stocky lady, feisty in a Barbara Bush sort of way. She wore Nancy Reagan designer clothes that had been altered to accommodate her frame.

"Thanks so much for coming, Bonnie," Betty said as Bonnie entered through her front door. Bonnie stopped just inside the living room. While she surveyed the wallpaper, she removed an expensive leather satchel she wore looped over one shoulder and set it beside her on the floor. She removed her suede driving gloves, one finger at a time, and dropped them into the open satchel. She definitely wore nicer clothes and more makeup and had lighter-colored hair than when her husband had been alive, Betty thought.

"Can I fix you anything? A drink?" Betty offered.

"Oh, no thanks. I'm sort of in a hurry." Then, looking from the wallpaper to Betty, Bonnie asked, "Exactly what is your emergency, Betty?"

"Well—" Betty wrung her hands nervously. "Can we sit down?"

"It's about Ernie, isn't it?" Bonnie guessed without sitting.

Betty indicated by nodding that it was.

"You want to—to be rid of him, right?"

"How'd you know that?"

Bonnie laughed. "Only because you've got 'I want to kill my husband' written all over your face."

Betty guiltily put both hands to her face.

"I've got just the thing for you," Bonnie said. She reached into her open satchel, down past the driving gloves, and pulled out something covered with a bright-red scarf. She lifted a corner of the scarf and pulled it back slowly, revealing a nickel-plated pistol that glistened in the afternoon sunlight.

Tentatively, Betty reached out and took the gun from Bonnie. "It's so heavy. And cold."

Bonnie smiled like a sage imparting a wonderful secret. "Believe me, you'll warm to it."

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Betty traced a finger along the shiny metal. Without looking up she asked, "Why'd *you* do it, Bonnie? Was it because you couldn't get along?"

"Why'd I kill J.C.? On the contrary. If anything, it was because J.C. was too agreeable."

"I don't get it."

"You see, J.C. used to be extremely opinionated. Challenged me on just about everything I said or did—which, in retrospect, was good for me. But then one day, like turning on a switch, he suddenly began agreeing. I'd say, 'J.C., let's take our vacation in December this year instead of June,' and he'd say, 'Sounds fine by me.' I'd say, 'J.C., I'm voting Democrat this year,' and he'd say, 'Whatever you want.' Then the topper came one night when I said, 'J.C., I've decided to dye my hair blonde.' And do you know what he said? He said, 'Sure.' Only he said it in a distant way, like maybe he didn't hear me, like maybe his brain was randomly selecting responses, whether they were right or not."

"So you shot him for that?"

"My theory is this," Bonnie said, clasping her hands before her like a well trained public speaker. "Regardless of what all the *Cosmopolitan* marriage surveys say about getting along—of which, by the way, has Ernie passed even *one* of those?" Betty shook her head. "I wouldn't have thought so. Anyway, I believe when two people come to agree on *everything*, then one of them becomes unnecessary. So as far as I was concerned, J.C. merely became unnecessary. That's why I shot him. And believe me, I'm not the only one who subscribes to this theory. You remember Calvin and Helen Floyd?"

"Helen? Who had that awful accident where she—"

Bonnie was shaking her head from side to side and grinning an I-know-something-you-don't-know grin. "Helen became *unnecessary*," she explained.

Betty's chin dropped. "I had no idea!"

"That *is* the idea."

"But it's not that Ernie and I agree so much, it's—"

Bonnie cut her off with a stern and unyielding look, the kind Barbara Bush gives to the reporter who asks if she's ever considered dyeing her hair.

Betty held the gun, or rather let it lay across both palms, as if she were attempting to guess its weight. After a moment, she gripped the pistol somewhat like it was meant to be gripped and implored Bonnie with her round, innocent eyes.

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Bonnie understood. "Good. Now this doesn't have to be difficult, dangerous, or messy. If we can just sit down and talk for ten minutes, I can tell you how to make everything appear to be one big accident."

As they moved to the sofa together, Bonnie talked on. She had to reach up slightly in order to place a chummy arm across Betty's shoulders. "You're not going to regret this at all, Betty. Believe me, you'll be a lot better off. You'll meet new people. You'll—now don't tell anyone, but Calvin Floyd and I have been seeing each other for the last few weeks. There's something about him I find so utterly attractive." She allowed herself a girlish giggle before wiping the smile from her face and becoming more businesslike. "Now, I take it Ernie has a life-insurance policy?"

Ernie was a little later arriving home than usual. Betty could always count on him walking through the door at 5:14 or 5:15 and setting his car keys on top of the television. (She hated it when he did that.) But today he didn't walk in until 5:35. She heard the keys clank and she cringed.

She had just put the last load of laundry in for the day and was in the kitchen waiting for him. "Betty!"—she heard his voice, muffled by the door, call—"Sorry I'm late!" He was coming toward the kitchen. "I had to stop by Calvin Floyd's for a minute. We had a short talk and—" He pushed the door open and froze in mid-sentence at the sight of the gleaming pistol his wife held only inches from his nose. Betty may have pulled the trigger, too, had she not been frozen herself by the sight of the huge gun Ernie held only inches from her nose.

Her hand was shaking. Ernie's hand was shaking, too. The guns were shaking likewise.

"You're a bit nervous," Ernie said, the trembling apparent in his voice.

"You, too."

"Yeah, a little," Ernie admitted. "I've never—you know."

"Me neither."

"Be careful," Ernie said.

Betty nodded. "You, too."

There was a long uncomfortable silence.

"I guess things have gone a little too far to talk, huh?" Ernie asked.

Betty shrugged.

"Can you at least tell me *why* you want to kill me?"

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"A lot of reasons, Ernie. And you?"

"A lot."

Another long silence passed with each staring down the other's gun barrel. Finally Betty spoke first: "It's your socks, Ernie."

"My socks?"

"You never turn them right side out. I'm spending years of my life doing and *re*doing your socks."

Ernie took it better than she had expected. He nodded understandingly and said, "I can take care of that. But can you turn the light off in the closet when you're finished? It may be three or four days before I find it. That one habit could cost me thousands of dollars over the next fifty years."

"Okay. But what about your cereal bowls?" Her aim became a bit more steady now.

"Go on."

"You leave them on the counter without rinsing them and the cereal sits up like cement." Her voice cracked when she said, "And the dishwasher just can't handle that."

"Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah," Ernie responded. He adjusted his grip and thought for a moment before speaking: "How come when you park the car, it's always right in the middle of the drive? Why can't you park to the left or to the right—" he accented each direction with a wave of the gun barrel "—so I can park beside you?"

Betty ignored his question and responded with, "I like to watch Channel Four News, not Channel Five."

"And I hate macaroni salad."

"Do you think you could rinse the tub when you've finished?"

"Maybe—if you could go to the trouble to turn on the exhaust fan when you take a shower. You're ruining the plaster ceiling." Ernie's knuckle, wrapped tightly around the trigger, was a bloodless white.

"I wish you would shave *before* you go to bed," Betty continued, squeezing the trigger about the width of two hairs, until she believed it had reached its limit. Another fraction and something would snap, something would click, something would go *bang*.

"I wish you could order something in a restaurant and for once *not* change your mind just before it's ready."

"If you'd take me to a nice restaurant once in a while, I could try."

Now came the most awkward moment of silence yet, both partners slightly wounded.

Ernie's mouth quivered. He couldn't meet Betty's eyes any more. The knuckle darkened as circulation returned to his finger. When

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he spoke this time, his voice was soft. "Would you like to go out tonight? You know, to get something to eat?"

Betty nearly smiled at his schoolboy shyness. She hadn't recognized that expression on Ernie's face in over ten years, not since he'd asked her out for a cheeseburger after football homecoming—and she changed her order to a fish sandwich.

"If you'll just give me a minute, so I can do something to my hair."

Ernie sighed with resolve. "Good. Now what do we do with these things?" He waggled his gun but didn't lower it. Betty held her aim as well.

"Follow me," she said. She walked sideways and Ernie walked with her. She stopped when she was next to the kitchen sink. It was filled with grey, soupy water. The edge of a cereal bowl crested above the skim.

Betty tipped her head in the direction of the sink. "On three, okay?"

Ernie agreed.

"One." She moved the gun slightly to her right. Ernie moved his slightly to his left.

"Two." She moved some more. Ernie mirrored her.

"Three."

Plop!

Plop!

Now they both sighed. Ernie pointed to the soaking cereal bowls and said, "I'll take care of those later."

"That'd be nice of you."

Another silent moment passed. But this time it wasn't as long or as uncomfortable. It was almost pleasant. Ernie smiled, held open his arms, and Betty stepped into the welcoming circle, placed her head against his chest, and cuddled.

"You know, Ernie. I've been thinking."

"About what, darling?"

"About Bonnie and J.C. and Calvin and Helen."

"What about them?"

"Their marriages. Why do you think they failed so miserably?"

Ernie thought hard—the way he always did whenever Betty would force him to take one of those silly marriage-survey tests. "Communication," he finally said, knowing that to be the correct response to so many of the choices. "Some people just aren't able to talk about what bothers them the way that we do."

Betty, taken back by such an astute observation coming from

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Ernie, decided to pursue this. "And so you think each begins to project their own shortcomings onto the persona of their partner?"

"No," Ernie said. "They just pull the trigger."

The vibration of the washer in the spin cycle shook through them both almost like a shiver.

Betty squeezed her husband closer. "We're awfully lucky," she said.

Ernie hugged his wife as if to agree and then laughed softly.

"What's so funny?" Betty asked, pushing back just enough to see his face.

"Calvin Floyd," Ernie said. "He doesn't have all the answers by a long shot."

DETECTIVERSE

NOCTURNAL DRILL

by ALLISON FRANZ

In a little cabin at the foot of a hill,
We lived and loved, just me and Jill,

One dark night when the moon shone nil,
We made a pact: we'd take a pill.
I said, "You go first and then I will."

Now I sit listening to the whippoorwill,
Write my poems, and think of Jill.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

SHIZUKO NATSUKI

Yuhei's face was covered with blood and dirt, the shirt under his leather jacket was soaked in blood, and his legs, visible through gaping tears in his trousers, were a mass of cuts. Omuro called out his name in a loud voice. There was no reaction . . .

DIVINE PUNISHMENT

by SHIZUKO NATSUKI

It was shortly after six in the morning when Matsuko Torikai rushed into the courtyard of Futami-ga-Ura shrine. It was a cold winter's day and a thick mist sent tendrils swirling through the fields as she covered the hundred yards or so from her house.

"Where is the priest? I've got to see the priest!" she cried to Yamaguchi, a junior priest who was sweeping the garden in front of the shrine. She was wearing slacks, a sweater, and a dirty apron, and from the state of her hair it would appear that she had only just got out of bed.

"What's wrong?"

"Where's the priest? He has to come to my house right away!"

Yamaguchi looked back over his shoulder toward the buildings of the shrine, not sure how to handle the situation. Ignoring him, Matsuko ran to the bottom of the steps leading to the main building and called out in a loud voice, "Are you there? You've got to help me!"

The priest, Sadamasa Omuro, had just finished the morning devotions and hurried out to see what was the matter. He was a tall, athletic-looking man of about forty-five who had attended graduate school in Tokyo. He was well liked by his parishioners. Ever since Matsuko's husband died, it had become her habit to come and see him nearly every day to talk over her problems.

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"Please help me! It's Yuhei! He—he—" She broke into tears and Omuro couldn't make out what she was trying to say. Yuhei was her twenty-two-year-old son.

"What has Yuhei done?" he asked, bending down to look into her face.

"He's been hurt! I found him lying in front of the house, covered with blood. I tried to wake him, but he doesn't move! I don't know what to do!"

"Have you called for an ambulance?"

"Not yet. I thought that if you were to have a look at him—"

Omuro hurried down the steps and, thrusting his feet into a pair of garden clogs lying there, he ran in the direction of Matsuko's house, calling to Yamaguchi to follow.

The shrine was situated on a peninsula on the western side of Fukuoka Prefecture, and as he ran Omuro could see several farmhouses dotted among the brown winter fields. Most of the people in the area made a living from fishing and farming and Matsuko was no exception. She lived in an old single-story house and both it and the small cart parked next to it were covered in white dust from the unpaved road that led to the shrine.

Yuhei was lying face up on the ground next to the verandah, with a straw mat draped over the lower half of his body.

"When did you find him?"

"Just after I woke up. I opened the shutters and—"

"Did he have that mat on him when you found him?"

"Yes. It completely covered him, but I pulled it back, wondering what it could be, and—"

As they moved closer to the body, Omuro and Yamaguchi involuntarily looked away. Yuhei's face was covered with blood and dirt, the shirt under his leather jacket was soaked in blood, and his legs, visible through gaping tears in his trousers, were a mass of cuts.

Omuro removed the straw mat and called out Yuhei's name in a loud voice. There was no reaction. He put his ear next to Yuhei's mouth for a few moments, then he turned to Yamaguchi.

"He's not breathing and his body is cold. I'd better get in touch with the police straightaway. You stay here."

Leaving Yamaguchi with Yuhei, he hurried into the house, followed by Matsuko. The living room on the far side of the hall was in a terrible mess, but he spotted a telephone on the floor. He dialed 110 for the emergency service and gave a brief description of the

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situation. In less than five minutes, two cars arrived from the local police station at Shima.

The man in charge was thirty-six-year-old Assistant Inspector Koizumi and with him were four men, two from the identification section. They established that Yuhei was already dead, and when they told the Inspector it appeared to be murder he called Prefectural Headquarters to notify the homicide division and have them send over a medical examiner.

"At what time did you discover the body?" Koizumi asked Matsuko while his men covered the body with the mat and strung a rope around the scene to prevent unauthorized people from entering.

Matsuko was in her early fifties. Her husband had been a fisherman and since he died she had worked to support Yuhei and herself. The hard work had aged her and her skin was very tanned and wrinkled from her long hours in the sun.

"I got up at six o'clock, as usual, and when I opened the shutters—"

"I see. Where did Yuhei go last night?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen much of him lately. He spends most of his time at his sister's and only drops by here occasionally."

Matsuko had two children. Her elder, Takako, lived with her husband in a council apartment in Fukuoka City.

"You said that Yuhei was twenty-two and dropped out of high school. What did he do for a living?"

"He worked now and again on construction sites or as a mechanic. You have no idea the amount of trouble he gave Takako and me." Matsuko spoke quite calmly, but every now and again she covered her face with her hands as a sob wrenched itself from her body.

"So he was basically unemployed, then. If he was going to come back here from his sister's yesterday, how would he have traveled? By bus?"

It was quite a distance to the nearest bus stop, but there was no other way he could have come.

"He used to like bikes," Matsuko said. "He went everywhere on his bike until about six months ago." She went suddenly silent and Koizumi looked over at Omuro questioningly.

"He was involved in an accident and banned from driving," Omuro said. "His mother was very worried about it and came to discuss it with me several times."

"So even though he wanted to drive, he was unable to," Koizumi said.

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"No, that's not true," Yamaguchi intruded. "I saw him driving around on someone else's bike occasionally."

The Chief Investigator and the doctor arrived at almost the same time and the doctor wasted no time in officially pronouncing Yuhei dead. The two then proceeded to examine the corpse and were appalled at what they found.

"Head, shoulder, stomach, knees, legs—he has been struck seven or eight times with a blunt instrument. The cause of death is probably cerebral concussion received from a blow to the back of the head." The Chief Investigator explained to the members of the homicide squad when they arrived.

"Can you tell what the weapon was?" one of the homicide squad asked.

"The wounds would indicate he was hit with a bat or club of some kind as well as with a rectangular bar of some kind."

"You mean that he was hit with more than one weapon?"

"It would appear so."

"That means that there was more than one of them," the homicide detective said to Koizumi.

"That's not necessarily true. It would have been possible for the murderer to have struck him on the head first to knock him unconscious, then used another weapon or more to beat him to death," Koizumi replied.

"True—but he would have to be a big man."

Yuhei had been five feet ten inches tall and well built, so it followed that whoever had killed him must have been very strong.

"How long since his death?" The man from homicide asked the Chief Investigator.

"Six or seven hours, I think."

"So that means that at some time between eleven o'clock last night and one o'clock this morning, the victim was murdered and his body carried here to his house." There was no sign of the murder weapon and no bloodstains in the vicinity of the body. "The murderer covered the body with the mat and escaped."

"I think it's also safe to guess that the murderer was known to the victim," said Koizumi. "He not only knew where he lived, but whoever it was hated him very much indeed."

The body was sent for an autopsy.

Although it was a very vicious murder, they had been able to identify the victim from the beginning and so it wasn't necessary

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for them to set up a separate investigation headquarters and they worked out of the local police station.

Their first task was to try to discover the scene of the actual murder and then search the area for the murder weapons and any other clues. At the same time, they had to check on all the victim's acquaintances, especially those who had reason to hate him enough to kill him. The obvious place to start checking on his friends would be at his home, but it was possible that if he had given someone reason to hate him that much, his family might try to keep it hidden from the police. For this reason, the investigation proceeded along two paths, one group questioning the family, the other the people who lived nearby, a more promising approach in the country, where people tend to know more about their neighbors.

Koizumi started his inquiries at the Futami-ga-Ura shrine. Not only was it very close to the victim's house, but from what he had learned that morning the victim's mother was a regular visitor to the shrine and relied on the chief priest for advice.

Futami-ga-Ura shrine was a medium-sized complex employing twenty priests. In the last ten years, it had seen a huge increase in the number of people who came to worship there. After Omuro took over as chief priest from his father, he had stressed its dedication to the god of traffic safety, and this had led to its sudden rise in popularity. Situated as it was beside the sea, the local fishermen had always come to pray for safety at sea, and Omuro had expanded this to cover all forms of transport. He had even gone so far as to take out commercials on television and radio, and as a result people came all the way from Fukuoka and the surrounding prefectures to pray at the shrine. Owners of transport companies came at the new year to pray for protection over the coming months and people brought their new cars to have them blessed by the priests or simply to buy charms to hang from their dashboards.

"I'm sorry I wasn't able to prevent Yuhei's motorcycle accident," Omuro said after showing Koizumi through to the shrine's office. He obviously felt some responsibility for the death. "His mother is a devout believer and came to pray for his safety nearly every day, but unfortunately he never set foot through the gate himself."

"Can you tell me something about last year's accident?" Of course it would be easy for Koizumi to check the records back at the station, but he thought it could be more enlightening if he were to ask instead.

"It was the end of July last year, I think. Yuhei ran over a twenty-

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year-old girl in Fukuoka City and killed her. She was crossing the street at a pedestrian crossing, and although Yuhei tried to make an emergency stop his bike skidded and hit her. He had been stopped several times before that for speeding and was worried that he would be sent to prison, but luckily he had not been drinking and wasn't driving very fast. The road had been wet and that was what had caused him to skid, so the judge gave him a one-year sentence suspended for three years. Of course, he was also banned from driving for two years."

"But as the victim was only twenty years old, he must have had to pay a good deal of compensation."

"No, he had only the minimum insurance cover. The insurance company paid the maximum twenty-five million yen to the girl's parents, but Yuhei was unemployed and the judge deemed him incapable of paying any more. There was a lot of fuss about it at the time."

"Didn't he have a house or any land?"

"No, his father was a fisherman, but he died of a stroke about ten years ago and all he left was the house and land. After that, Matsuko worked in a supermarket to earn the money to raise her two children but she didn't have anything extra afterward. The house is standing on only about a hundred and sixty square yards of land, but it is all in Matsuko's name. All the same, the land around here is worth about ten thousand yen per square yard now."

"Yes, but Yuhei was an adult and she wasn't liable for him under law."

"That's true. But Matsuko is a very honest woman and she offered to sell the land to pay the girl's parents. They refused, saying they had no desire to impoverish her and even if they took her money it wouldn't bring their daughter back to them."

"Was she their only child?"

"Yes. She was in her last year at junior college and had already found a job for when she graduated. It was a terrible experience for Matsuko, but even worse for the girl's parents."

The accident had taken place at approximately five o'clock on the evening of July the twenty-third at the Tajima junction in Fukuoka City. After calling the local police station, Koizumi learned that it had been more or less the way Omuro had described it.

"Normally the parents would have been awarded at least a hundred million in damages, but as the driver was unemployed and

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there was no way of forcing him to pay the case ended without any clear decision being made," the chief of the traffic police told him. "It wasn't just the money that the victim's parents found hard to accept, it was the general attitude of the driver. He went to visit them once, but only because his mother forced him to, and he sulked the whole time he was there. Matsuko did everything she could to apologize, and if it wasn't for her efforts the parents would probably have gone to the judge and asked him to remove the suspension from the sentence."

While Koizumi was questioning the neighbors, the other team was investigating the victim's movements of the previous day and trying to discover where the murder had taken place.

They found a 400cc motorcycle about four hundred yards to the south of Matsuko's house, parked by the side of a narrow lane that branched off the main road. A river ran next to the lane, but the bike was parked in the shadow of the woods on the opposite side. The driver's helmet hanging from one of the mirrors was wet from the rain that started to fall that afternoon. There were no other houses in the area and the bike looked as if it had been left there for some time, although there didn't appear to be anything wrong with it.

They checked on the number and found it belonged to Sumio Yazawa, 23, of Fukuoka City. They visited his address and found him still at home. He was employed by a bar nearby and didn't start work until four in the afternoon.

"I lent it to Yuhei yesterday afternoon. We were in junior high school together and although I knew he was banned from driving I couldn't refuse when he asked."

He was a rather weak-looking young man and they guessed that Yuhei had forced him to lend him the bike. At about nine the previous night he had appeared at the bar where Yazawa worked and borrowed the bike, saying he would return it within two or three days.

"His mother lives in the country, but there's nothing there for him to do so he has been staying at his sister's place. She lives in a council apartment in Kashiwabara. That's where he came from yesterday, I think."

"Why did he want the bike?"

Yazawa shook his head. "I didn't ask him. I guess he just wanted to go for a drive somewhere."

At the end of their questioning, the police told him what had

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happened to Yuhei and asked him if he had any idea who might have wanted to kill him. He turned white and started to tremble, but said he knew of no one.

His statement tied up with the one they had taken from Yuhei's sister, Takako. She had heard about the tragedy from her mother and hurried over to be with her, taking her two young children with her—it was there that she was interviewed.

"Yuhei has been staying at our apartment off and on since last summer. After the accident, he was hounded by the police and by lawyers when he was here at Mother's and, being banned from driving, he couldn't get around, so he stayed with us. Our apartment has only four rooms, and my husband, who works for an electronics manufacturer, comes home early, so it is very cramped. With the two children, there wasn't really room for him, but my husband doesn't like confrontation and Yuhei took advantage of him, acting as if he owned the place. Yesterday he hung around the house all day until about eight o'clock, when he went out, saying something about borrowing Yazawa's bike."

From this, they had a fair idea of Yuhei's movements the previous night. He had stayed in the apartment until about eight o'clock, then traveled by bus or subway to Yazawa's bar, where he borrowed the motorbike. If he had driven straight to the spot where the bike was found, he could have arrived there in about an hour—but if, as Yazawa suggested, he had wanted to go for a drive there was no telling where he went.

One thing that they did know, however, was that sometime between eleven and one, he had arrived at the spot where the bike was found and parked. It was thought that immediately after he had pulled over to the side of the road and dismounted, he was hit on the back of the head and then beaten to death after losing consciousness.

That afternoon the results of the autopsy came through. The cause of death proved to be a blow on the back of the head with a blunt instrument and the time of death was estimated to be at about eleven o'clock the previous night, backing up the original estimate made at the scene. Yuhei had eaten a meal at his sister's before he went out and more than three hours had passed between then and the time he died.

There were some fields on the other side of the woods next to where the bike was found, and in one corner was a small hut con-

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taining farm implements and fertilizer. The door was unlocked, and when they looked inside the detectives saw that this was where Yuhei had been beaten to death.

There were bloodstains on the timber and on the hoes, spades, and other implements in the room, and the ground was spattered with dark stains. The blood was analyzed and, predictably, the blood type matched Yuhei's. The only disappointment was that they could find no clear fingerprints on the tools and they guessed that the murderer or murderers must have wiped them clean before leaving the scene.

That night at eight o'clock, a meeting was held to discuss the progress that had been made in the investigation that day.

"We still cannot say for sure whether it was the work of one man or more," the chief of detectives said. "However, it does seem very likely that a car was used in the crime. I think it would have taken a car to force the motorcycle to stop. The bike was found about fifty yards from the junction with the main road and at that point it still would not have been traveling very fast. If the killer or killers had parked a car in the middle of the road, the victim would have stopped instinctively. Once he or they had him off the bike, they could chat to him until he took his helmet off, then hit him over the head."

"But if they were carrying weapons, surely he would have been suspicious and protected himself."

"Yes, but it was pitch-black."

"I think there were probably two of them. One could approach him openly while the other came up and hit him from behind."

Another detective voiced his opinion. "I don't agree that a car was needed to force him to stop. If a group of people were to stand in the middle of the road, he would have had to stop. Or if one person were to call out in a loud voice—"

"They'd run a certain risk of being run into, but, yes, it is possible."

It was unlikely that there would be anyone traveling along that road at eleven on a winter's night and there were no dwellings near the spot, so even if Yukei had called out there would be little likelihood of his being heard. There seemed to be little doubt that for some reason Yuhei was persuaded to get off his bike, then either knocked unconscious and carried or otherwise forced into the hut where he was beaten to death.

"But why did whoever it was bother to carry the body four hundred yards to his house?"

"To show that he was killed for a motive," one of the senior de-

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tectives suggested. "To show that it wasn't a casual murder, but one that had been planned."

"I agree it's unlikely that it was the work of a passerby," Koizumi said. "They obviously planned to use that hut, and that's why they stopped him where they did. But how did they know he'd be passing that way?"

The room became silent as they all thought about it.

"His mother said he came home every now and again but she never knew when to expect him, and his sister said that it wasn't until eight o'clock that he decided to go out."

"Maybe somebody telephoned him."

"No, he didn't receive any calls before he went out," said the man who had interviewed Takako.

"But it didn't have to be that evening—it could have been during the afternoon, or even the previous day."

"That's true. If that was the case, there's no way of knowing. Takako went out in the afternoon with the children and he was left in the apartment on his own."

"Then again, maybe he didn't get a phone call. There's always the possibility that the killer or killers followed him after he left the apartment. They could have been following him for days, waiting for a chance to attack him."

"Well, whoever it was, they must have had a real grudge against him," Koizumi said.

"I still half expect her to come through the door and say hello the sweet way she always used to."

Assistant Inspector Koizumi and one of his sergeants had gone to visit the home of Sumire Tatsumi, the girl Yuhei had killed. They were greeted by the girl's mother, Akie, who still had trouble accepting what had happened to her daughter. There was a picture of the dead girl on the family shrine—she was an attractive, gentle-looking girl.

The detectives were shown into the living room and were told that the father, Hiroaki, was in bed in the next room. The strain of her death had proved too much for him and the previous month he had undergone an operation. It appeared that he was suffering from the beginnings of stomach cancer.

"My husband often said that he would like to kill the man who did that to her," Akie admitted, "but he is unable to move from his bed . . ."

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During the initial investigation meeting, it had been suggested that the murder might have been committed by a lover of the dead girl, but they had been unable to find any trace of such a person. The girl's parents had also been posed as possible suspects, but neither of them had a driving license or any great physical strength, so it seemed unlikely that they could have done it on their own.

It was at that point that Koizumi came up with an astonishing idea: what if *Yuhei's* mother had been involved? He suggested that it was unlikely that the murderer or murderers would just happen to come across Yuhei when he was in a place where there was very little likelihood of them being seen and where there was a hut containing the murder weapons so conveniently situated. What if his mother had been so disgusted by his behavior that she had conspired with Takako or Sumire's parents to lure him there and put him off his guard?

A week passed without any new leads and the police began to grow desperate.

"We have no choice but to bring forward a witness," Koizumi said. This was on the first Friday in February.

"A witness?" a colleague asked. "What do you mean? If we had a witness, we wouldn't be having all this trouble."

"We'll just have to persuade one to come forward." Koizumi had spent the night working on a plan. "A cousin of mine lives in an apartment near here. She's twenty-six, single, and works in the restaurant at the golf course. She drives to work every day. I think she's just what we're looking for."

"But what will she say if we ask her?"

"I *have* asked her—she is very eager to help."

That night Matsuko stopped off at the shrine on her way back from the supermarket where she worked, and as she was walking to her house from there she noticed two of the detectives walking toward her. One of them spoke.

"Mrs. Torikai, I'm sorry it's taken us so long to make any progress, but I think we've got a lead at last."

Matsuko looked at him expectantly.

"This is still confidential, but we thought you should know. This morning a witness came forward to say that she thinks she saw the murderer. She works in the restaurant at the golf course. On the night of the nineteenth, driving home past the spot where we found

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the motorcycle, she saw a suspicious figure. Whoever it was, they were so involved in what they were doing they didn't seem to notice her, but she got a good view in the headlights of her car and says she's sure she'd recognize them if she were to see them again."

"Why did she wait all this time before she came forward to the police?"

"She says she remembered reading about Yuhei's accident and felt so sorry for the victim's parents she decided she wouldn't help. One of her relatives was killed by a bike gang and she's hated all bikers ever since. However, she claims that Yuhei came to her in a dream the other night, covered with terrible wounds, and begged her to help us find the people who killed him."

A look of horror came over Matsuko's face and she stepped back from the detective.

"She wants to lay his soul at rest as soon as she can," he continued. "We've given her photographs of everyone who might have a motive to harm Yuhei, including those who knew Sumiré Tatsumi, and she's looking through them, trying to identify the person she saw. If that doesn't work, we'll make a composite sketch based on her description. It's only a question of time before we find the killer now we have a witness."

"Are you sure you can trust her memory?" Matsuko sounded afraid to hope. "It has been some time now."

"Yes," the detective assured her. "She's a very bright young woman."

"You say she works in the restaurant at the golf club?"

"Yes, that's correct. She lives in her own apartment in Imajuku."

Imajuku was a town situated at the base of the peninsula. The golf club was located in the middle. The detectives answered Matsuko's questions quite openly, telling her the name and address of the witness and the address of the golf club where she worked. What they did not say was whether the person she had seen was male or female or what they had been doing when she saw them.

At the same time they were talking to Matsuko, a different pair of detectives had gone to see the Tatsumi family and told them the same story.

"Although we haven't announced it to the press yet," one of them said, "we've found a witness. She is presently going through the photographs of all the likely suspects—we think it's only a matter of time now before the murderer is caught."

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They, too, let slip the girl's name and address but gave no details of the person she was supposed to have seen.

Koizumi's "witness," Naomi Kiriyama, carried on her daily routine as before, going to work at the golf club every day. She left her apartment at seven-fifteen in the morning, arriving at the clubhouse on the peninsula at seven-thirty. The restaurant opened at eight in the morning and, during the winter season, closed at six o'clock in the evening. Naomi's working hours varied somewhat, depending on the season and whether she was on the early or late shift.

The road she took to get to the clubhouse led through woods and fields, and the police followed her now at a discreet distance to make sure she wasn't attacked en route. They felt confident that she would be safe while she was in the clubhouse, but at night a watch was kept outside her apartment and a woman constable remained indoors with her.

When nothing happened for the first five days, Matsuko rang the police to find out what progress they had made now that they had a witness.

"We've started by showing her pictures of Sumire Tatsumi's friends, but Ms. Kiriyama still hasn't been able to come up with the person she saw," the chief of detectives told her. "We're also arranging for her to see the people in person, since it's sometimes difficult to tell from a picture. We're sure we'll have some news for you soon, Mrs. Torikai."

All the while, they kept up their surveillance on Naomi Kiriyama. The apartment block where she lived was open to the elements, which made it easy to watch her door. There was a car park on the opposite side of the road, backed by thick woodland, and they were able to park their car there without drawing any attention to themselves.

Two days later, things started to happen.

A taxi drove through the woods to the apartment house, where it stopped and a tall thin man in a raincoat got out. The taxi pulled away and the man stood looking up at the building for a moment. He didn't behave as if he were one of the residents, but Koizumi couldn't see his face from where their car was parked.

The man walked in through the entrance, apparently headed for the elevator.

He appeared again on the third floor and walked along the outside

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corridor until he came to Naomi's door. He paused for a minute as if to get his breath, then reached out to press the buzzer by her door. When he saw that, Koizumi slipped out of the car, leaving the other officer inside. He watched as Naomi came to the door and, after a brief conversation, invited the man in.

Koizumi hurried upstairs and along the corridor until he reached Naomi's door, then took up position outside the half open bathroom window. He couldn't see inside, but there was a woman constable inside, and if Naomi called out he should be able to hear her quite easily.

The man had been in there for a little over a quarter of an hour when Koizumi heard noises on the other side of the door that indicated he was leaving. Koizumi hurried down to the other end of the hall and stepped down into the emergency staircase, leaving the door open a fraction so he could watch what happened. He saw the man come out and turn to say something to Naomi. He only had time to notice that the man had a receding chin before he turned and walked away toward the elevator. After he had disappeared, Koizumi went out to the corridor and signaled for his colleague in the car to follow the man and see where he lived. If need be, he could arrest him en route.

That done, Koizumi went back and entered the unlocked apartment and found Naomi in the living room, talking excitedly with the woman officer. "Who was he?" Koizumi asked her.

Naomi turned toward him, an excited look on her tanned face. "Hiroaki Tatsumi, the father of Sumire Tatsumi—the girl Yuhei killed in the accident."

As soon as she said it, Koizumi realized it was true. When he'd seen Sumire's father at his house, he had been in bed and Koizumi hadn't recognized him standing up.

"What did he want?"

"He brought four pictures of his wife and set them down on the table over there," Naomi said, nodding toward the table. There was nothing there now. "He asked if she was the person I'd seen at the scene of the murder and told me that it was his wife. He was worried that she might have killed Yuhei in revenge for their daughter and begged me to keep quiet about it if it was."

"What?" Koizumi looked at Naomi in amazement.

"He said he'd heard that I also lost a relative to a bike gang, so I must know how he felt. Apparently he's just had an operation for stomach cancer and he said that if his wife is arrested he'll have no

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choice but to kill himself. He can't bear to think that his whole family could be destroyed because of that man, but he knew that the police would show me a picture of his wife sooner or later and he couldn't just sit back and wait until it happened."

Koizumi looked over at the woman officer and she nodded in confirmation. She'd been in the next room listening to the conversation, ready to come to Naomi's help if she was needed.

"And what did you reply?"

"I didn't know what to say, I felt so sorry for him. I did say I was pretty sure it wasn't his wife I saw. I stressed that I couldn't be absolutely certain from a photo, but that I was ninety percent sure it wasn't. He looked very relieved and thanked me repeatedly on his way out."

Koizumi sat down on the sofa dejectedly. "I never expected this to happen."

When he had set Naomi up as a fake witness, he'd expected the killer to try to silence her, or at least approach her in some way—as soon as that happened, they could move in. He hadn't allowed for something like this.

"There's nothing for it," he told her. "I'm afraid we'll have to stick with it a little longer. I'm sorry to put you to so much trouble."

"It's okay," she said.

"Don't let your guard down at the golf club. The killer might approach you there to test you, to see if you recognize him or not."

"Test me?" Naomi looked at Koizumi questioningly. "Now that you mention it, one of the guests called me to his table twice last week. No, it couldn't be him—"

"What do you mean?"

"I wear a name badge there. The first time the man called me by name as I was passing. The next time he beckoned me to his table from the other side of the room."

"What did he want?"

"The first time he simply asked for a glass of water. The second time he wanted some toothpicks—but when I went to his table, he stared at me oddly."

"Is he a member of the club?"

"Yes. He doesn't come by very often, but last week I saw him twice. I mentioned him to the manager and he told me he was the priest from the Futami-ga-Ura shrine. So no doubt it's meaningless."

Koizumi didn't give Naomi's comments much thought. There was

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nothing to connect the priest Omuro with Yuhei's death. It wasn't until after the bank-holiday weekend on February thirteenth that he suddenly realized what the case had been all about.

That morning, one of the other detectives sat at a nearby desk reading the newspaper. "It says here that last weekend saw the largest number of worshipers since the new year. That's why it seemed so crowded."

"What are you talking about?"

"The Sugawara shrine. My son will be taking his university entrance exams this year, so my wife and I took him to the shrine to pray for his good luck."

Sugawara shrine was located to the south of Fukuoka City and was famous nationwide for its dedication to the god of learning. Every year before the exam season it was packed with young people seeking help in their forthcoming tests. It even opened a branch in Tokyo for the season and made a great deal of money selling good-luck charms.

"It must be hell for the children of the priests there. If they fail *their* exams, it doesn't say much for the efficacy of the prayers or the charms they sell."

"Yes, the priests must take it very seriously, considering the amount of money at stake."

"It must be the same for the priests at Futami-ga-Ura," Koizumi said. "It would ruin their business if any of them were involved in a traffic accident."

No sooner had he spoken than he felt his pulse quicken.

"That's true. They make a fortune out of their dedication to the god of road safety."

"Yes. It wouldn't be so bad if it was only a minor accident." Koizumi sat deep in thought for a while, then telephoned the Chief Investigator at the Prefectural Headquarters.

"If a person was run over by a car, then beaten severely with a blunt instrument, would you be able to tell from the autopsy?"

"It would depend on a number of factors, but to be quite honest I doubt it. When a pedestrian is hit by a car, the bumper hits them at about knee level and they are thrown up into the air. When they come down, they generally hit their head on the road and the most common cause of death is cerebral concussion. However, the wounds are identical to those that would be received if they were hit with a heavy blunt instrument. And if the body was subsequently beaten, it's unlikely we could tell the difference."

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"Could you tell if the subsequent wounds were made after death or not?"

"Not if they were made straightaway. I'm afraid you're going to have a lot of trouble proving this, you know," the Chief Investigator added as he realized what Koizumi was hinting at.

They made discreet inquiries and managed to discover that on the night of the murder, the priest, Sadamasa Omuro, had attended a party in Fukuoka City and remained there until approximately ten o'clock. He seldom drank much and that night was no exception. He'd had one glass of beer and driven himself home in his BMW.

Further inquiries proved that four days later the same BMW had been put in for repairs at a garage in the center of town, a considerable distance from the shrine. It had a slight dent in the right-hand side of the bumper and the young priest who brought it in told the mechanic that the chief priest had hit the side of the garage as he was parking the previous night.

Once the detectives discovered this, they borrowed the car from Omuro and ran a luminol test on the trunk. Although it looked very clean, the test registered positive—which meant there were invisible traces of blood there.

They asked Omuro to accompany them to the police station.

Soon after they started questioning him, he admitted everything.

"The accident occurred a little after eleven. I turned off the main road toward the shrine and was just accelerating out of the curve when someone ran across in front of me. He must have stopped to relieve himself in the river and was returning to the opposite side of the road and didn't bother to look before he crossed.

"Of course I stopped the car and hurried back to see if he was all right. There was no blood, but he was breathing shallowly. There was no telephone at hand, so I couldn't call an ambulance. I thought it would be best if I took him to the hospital in my car.

"Until I got him to the car, my only thought was to save him. But when I laid him down on the back seat, he'd stopped breathing. I saw then that there was a wound on his head and I realized he must have hit it when I knocked him down.

"I was filled with despair when I thought about what people would say when they heard what I'd done. It would mean the end of the shrine and everything I've worked for all these years.

"That was when I realized that my victim was Yuhei Torikai, who

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lived near the shrine. He'd had a bad reputation since high school and I knew he had killed a girl in a traffic accident last year. His mother came to discuss her problems with me regularly and so I knew all he had done to hurt her. He'd been banned from driving after the accident, but I knew he still drove around on a bike now and again, and when I looked I saw one parked on the opposite side of the road, a helmet hanging from the handlebars.

"He was hated by the parents of the dead girl and his mother was at her wits' end as to how to deal with him. He was already dead and I thought—"

As soon as he had made his plan, Omuro didn't hesitate to put it into action. He knew there was a shed on the other side of the woods and, carrying the body there, he then proceeded to beat it repeatedly with the tools inside, telling himself that Yuhei was being punished by God. Afterward, he put the bloody body in the trunk of his car and drove it to Matsuko's house, where he laid it out and covered it with a straw mat he'd taken from the shed. He did that to make it look as if Yuhei had been killed in some kind of revenge murder. He also hoped the police would think it was the work of more than one person—which was why he'd used more than one weapon to beat him with.

When he heard that a girl from the golf club claimed to have seen the murderer, he wondered if it could be true. He couldn't bear not knowing if he had been seen or not, and so in the end he had gone to the golf course to check it out. Twice. That had proved his undoing.

He had acted instinctively, without thinking, and realized now what a terrible thing he had done. He wasn't going to hide any longer, he told the police, and was willing to face whatever punishment the law had for him.

"I've heard of people murdering someone and then trying to make it look like a traffic accident, but I've never heard of someone trying to make a traffic accident look like murder." The chief of detectives shook his head and sipped his sake. "The god of road safety must have been desperate that night to think up a story like that."

"Well, at least Yuhei's mother had nothing to do with it, after all," Koizumi said, his faith in human nature restored.

—translated by Gavin Frew

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EQMM 50TH ANNIVERSARY CONTEST

The next five questions in our fifty-question contest appear below. No answers should be sent to us until all fifty questions have appeared—in the October issue—and they must all be sent to us as a unit. The rules and other information pertaining to the contest are on the facing page.

11. What do eleven of the nineteen authors in this issue have in common?

12. Which author of a story in this issue has been a featured piano soloist with symphony orchestras across the U.S. and Canada?

13. Name a Nobel Prize winner whose fiction has appeared in EQMM.

14. Name a Pulitzer Prize winner whose fiction has appeared in EQMM.

15. Which *one* of the following has not been published in EQMM?

Steve Allen
Ray Bradbury
Edgar Rice Burroughs
William F. Buckley, Jr.
F. Scott Fitzgerald
Pete Hamill
John Jakes
Raymond Carver
Stephen King
Agatha Christie
Arthur C. Clarke
Gregory Mcdonald
Richard Selzer
P. G. Wodehouse

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First Prize: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover
Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen, edited by Eleanor Sullivan, published by Carroll & Graf
Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mug
The option to appear on a cover of *EQMM* with a celebrity of the winner's choice who agrees to said cover

Second and Third Prizes: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover

Fourth through Thirteenth Prizes: *Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen*

Fourteenth through Twenty-third Prizes: Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mugs

The winner will be the top scorer in answering 50 questions related to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—there will be 5 questions an issue from January through October 1991. In case of a tie, the earliest postmark will determine the winner. The deadline is October 15, 1991—entries should carry a postmark no later than that date.

All 50 questions must be submitted as a unit, the pages or copies of the pages for all ten issues together. Material sent in sections will not be considered. Only one entry will be allowed per person. All entries must include the contestant's legal name and full address. No entries will be returned, even if accompanied by a return envelope. Winners will be notified by mail and announced in the March 1992 issue. (No phone calls, please.)

Contributors to *EQMM* are not eligible to win the contest, nor are employees and their immediate families of Davis Publications, Inc., Carlson Promotion Group, or any of their affiliated agents, advertising, and promotional production agencies. All applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.

By entering the contest, all prize winners agree that Davis Publications and any of their respective agencies, affiliates, and employees shall have no liability for any injury, loss, or damage of any kind resulting from acceptance, possession, or use of any prize. Prizes are not transferable and are unreturnable. Davis Publications reserves the right to substitute a prize for one of equal or greater value and is not responsible for lost, late, damaged, or misdirected entries.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

FLIP JARRETT

"Care for a game?"

"Perhaps, if the stakes are right," the loner said.

"We play a penny a point." The local added apologetically, "It ain't much, but it's beer money."

"I play for information."

"How's that?"

"I win, you answer my question. You win, I answer yours."

"That's crazy. What do you know I'd care about?"

"That's a question. Win a game and ask."

Discussing Educating Rita *with Michael Caine at one of her famous film weekends at Tarrytown, New York, Judith Crist said, "One's first reaction to this story is that it's a reworking of* Pygmalion. *Yet it isn't." Your first reaction to "The Bet" may be that it's a reworking of Hemingway's "The Killers." Yet it isn't. It's an uncompromising story with an integrity of its own . . .*

THE BET

by FLIP JARRETT

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is a city built on beer. The town rides on a head of foam far more substantial than the short moon-driven waves on the rocky beach of the lake. The smell of yeast is thick in the air from spring to fall and only abates with the first snow. The winters are cold and bitter. The people cluster in neighborhood bars and drink the beer the city is built on to keep warm.

The neon signs display the names of the beers with Teutonic pride. The red and blue lights glow on the pale, fleshy faces of the locals as they watch football on a flickering TV set and throw darts at a cork board on the wall.

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The stranger sits in a corner booth near the dart board. He is a middle-aged man with a black beard and blue eyes. He drinks beer and smokes cigarettes and crushes the butts in a glass ashtray. He doesn't look at the people around him. He is intent on his drinking and smoking. Nobody in the bar pays him any attention. He is a loner, a stranger to the neighborhood and the neighborhood's only bar.

A drunken throw sends a red-and-white flighted dart into the dark paneling beside the loner's head. A local comes and stands swaying before his table.

"My dart," he slurs.

The loner looks at the man. He looks at the dart stuck deep in the wood. He looks back at the plump, flushed face of the local.

"You missed." His voice is soft and fluid.

"Sorry. I coulda put your eye out. Maybe you should sit somewheres else."

"I like it here. You should throw more carefully."

He pulls the dart from the wood, eyes never leaving the local's face, and hands it to him flights first.

"You throw?" The local takes the dart, fighting the feeling of unease the loner's blue eyes create.

"Yes."

"Care for a game?"

"Perhaps, if the stakes are right."

"We play a penny a point." The local adds apologetically, "It ain't much, but it's beer money."

"I play for information."

"How's that?"

"I win, you answer my question. You win, I answer yours."

"That's crazy. What do you know I'd care about?"

"That's a question. Win a game and ask."

"You're crazy." The local weaves back to his buddies at the bar. There is a lull in the raucous chatter as he tells the others of the loner's game. One at a time they sneak a look at the man in the corner booth. When they find his blue eyes meeting theirs, they look quickly back to their beers.

Finally, the youngest at the bar, a boy hardly old enough to drink with men, separates himself from the others. With their encouraging voices pushing him, he approaches the loner's table.

"I'll play you," he says without preamble.

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The loner looks at the local boy. He is pimply faced with only the slightest hint of a blond beard showing between the scars.

The loner says nothing in reply. He stands, takes off his jacket, and hangs it from a hook on the corner of the booth. He puts a hand in the pocket and brings out a small black-leather case. He walks to the bar, the locals parting like sheep. He sets the case on the bar and opens it. He takes three darts from the case and slides black flights on the ends.

The local boy throws first. He leans far over the mark and his long gangly arm blurs back and forth. He throws well. The loner stands, one toe on the mark, his body lean and balanced. His hand flicks and the darts hit with solid thumps. He throws better.

The game is over. The loner wins.

"Now you will answer my question."

"Sure, mister, whatever you say," the local boy says, sullen in defeat.

"Do you know Kramer?"

"Old Man Kramer? Jeez, man, everybody knows him. He comes in here a quarter of nine every night. Drinks two brews, then goes back to his grubby flat and doesn't show his face till the next night. Why do you want to know?"

"That's a question. Win a game and ask."

The local tries and loses again.

"I guess I owe you another answer," he says.

"You do."

"Well, ask."

"Where does Kramer live?"

"About two blocks from here in Old Lady Simpson's place. He's got a one bedroom on the first floor. Christ, why—"

"That's a question."

"I know, I know. 'Win a game and ask.' You are one crazy man, you know that?"

The loner smiles. The smile is not a pleasant one. "That, too, is a question."

"So, you wanna play again? Maybe this time for a beer or something? These questions are giving me the hebes."

"Yes. This time we play for a service."

"Wait a minute, pal, I don't do any weird stuff."

"I'm sure you don't," the loner says like he isn't sure at all. "No 'weird stuff.' You have my word."

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The local boy looks hard at the loner. There's something in those cold blue eyes that assures him this man's word is better than a signed and notarized contract. "Yeah, okay. But what sort of service can you do for me?"

"I can be a very helpful man to have in your debt." The loner says the word "helpful" with a shade of emphasis. The local boy thinks of a certain stud from the suburbs who is making moves on his girl. He is certain this man could "help" the guy into a hospital if he wins.

"Okay—I'll play one more time."

He loses.

"Christ, man, who taught you to throw darts, William Tell?"

"A service?" the loner reminds him.

"Yeah." The local boy is getting in way over his head but instinctively knows welching on the bet would be suicidal.

"Go tell Kramer I'm here."

"That's it, that's all?"

"That's all."

"But who will I say you are? I mean, what am I supposed to say, 'Some guy in the bar said he was here?' "

"He'll know."

The local boy looks at the others in the bar. They are watching him, sensing the tension like animals sense a storm coming.

"Okay," the local boy says. "A bet's a bet."

He gets his down-filled jacket from the rack by the door and steps out into the Wisconsin winter. Two blocks in summer is just two blocks, but with the temperature below zero and fat wet snowflakes falling two blocks stretch into frozen, thankless miles.

The boy puts his head down and follows the icy path by the high mountain of snowplow-piled snow on the curb and the dark storefronts. He walks fast, chancing a fall, to keep the warm blood circulating in his legs beneath thin jeans. He curses himself with every step. Why did he make such a stupid bet? Why did he feel he was losing more than a two-block trudge through a frigid night?

Old Lady Simpson's house is at the end of the second block. She died before he was born and some lawyer owns the house now. He walks around the side path to the back and into a hallway only slightly warmer than outside. To the left is the back door of the three-bedroom apartment facing the street and the stairs leading

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to the second floor. Kramer's door is to the right. He knocks loudly, knowing the old man is nearly deaf.

The door opens slowly, held by a chain. A blast of warm air seduces the local boy's face. A white head and spectacled face floats in the opening like a nearsighted cloud.

"Yes?" an age-weary voice inquires.

"It's me, Kramer." The local boy means no disrespect. He doesn't know the man's first name.

"Oh." Dim eyes focus through thick lenses. "The walk's already been shoveled."

The door starts to close. The local boy holds it with his hand. "I don't do walks any more—I got a job at the brewery now. Christ, can I come in? I'm freezing my butt off out here."

The door closes another inch and the chain rattles. The local boy moves through the opening and as Kramer bolts and chains the door he strips off his coat. If he kept it on he'd be sweat-soaked in a minute, then frozen even worse when he left.

He's in a cramped kitchen with a small table and two chairs. In the room beyond he sees an unmade bed and a dresser covered with medicine bottles.

"Sit down," Kramer says. He has a sing-song tonality to his speech.

The local boy hangs his coat on the back of a chair and sits. Kramer places his hands flat on the table and lowers himself gently into the other chair. He studies the younger man's face.

"I know you." He seems proud of the accomplishment of recognition. "You're from the bar. I was just getting ready to go there for my nightcap."

The local boy has never heard anyone refer to two bottles of dark beer as a nightcap and thinks it's funny, but the chill of the night and the nagging tension of his mission keep him from laughing. "There's a man at the bar," he says, wanting to be done with it and gone. "He said to tell you he was there."

"A man?"

"Yeah, maybe forty-five or fifty. About my height. Black hair and a beard. He's got blue eyes. And he shoots a mean game of darts."

The old man lowers his head and is silent.

"Kramer? Did you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Okay—well, that's that." But he doesn't get up to leave. After a minute, he asks the question he would have asked if he had won a game. "What's this all about?"

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Kramer raises his head. The kitchen light falls across his face, leaving deep shadows behind his glasses instead of eyes. When he speaks, the words come darker than the shadows.

"Twenty years ago I was ready to retire. The company I'd worked for all my life went bankrupt and I had no pension. You're too young to know what living on nothing but Social Security is like. A man came into the bar where I was drinking. It was the middle of the afternoon and we were alone. He was carrying a black bag. He said he'd play me a game of darts. The bet was a ride to Canada against the contents of the bag. The bag was full of money.

"I played him and I lost.

"I drove him north for hours. I had to stop and fill the car with gasoline. When he went to the rest room, I drove away. I called the police and told them where they'd find him. The reward money from the bank was enough to keep me out of a home."

Kramer once more puts his hands on the table and lifts himself to his feet. He walks slowly and takes a heavy grey overcoat off a hook on the front door.

"Where are you going?" the local boy asks him.

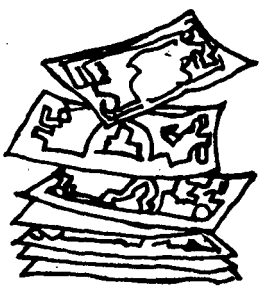
"It's time for my nightcap."

"But he's out there. I—I told him. It was the bet we made when he beat me at darts."

"When you lost, you paid your bet?"

"Y-yes."

"A bet's a bet, son. You paid yours, now let me pay mine."



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a NEW *Maynard Bullock story by*

JAMES POWELL

Bullock had been afraid things were turning into another of those messy amnesia cases which are the bane of Canadian police work. Canada had always had a much larger amnesia rate than it cared to admit. The culprits were all those fat icicles hanging from every eave just waiting for a sudden warm spell in winter or the spring thaw to bring them crashing down. For the sake of tourism and foreign investment, the government tried to hush things up. But on moonless nights, Canadians turned from their television sets and whispered stories about the Isle of Forgotten Memories, a large internment camp in the Gulf of St. Lawrence where amnesiacs stood around blinking at each other like owls behind barbwire, not even remembering if they were anglophone or francophone.

The latest leavening from James Powell, whose "A Dirge for Clowntown" won the 1989 EQMM Readers Award and whose "Burning Bridges" (February 1989 EQMM) was nominated for the Crime Writers of Canada short-fiction award . . .

THE VAN WINKLE LOAF

by JAMES POWELL

The time had come for Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock to hang his mother-in-law and make a proper job of it. Ten Christmases ago, the formidable Mrs. Fothergill had given them a portrait photograph of herself, whose dry smile even now proclaimed to the Bullock living room that here, at least, was one woman who had not fallen under the spell of the Mountie uniform.

But over time the nail on which the picture hung had loosened,

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so that if Bullock forgot and slammed the front door Mother Fothergill would crash to the floor. A while back, as a stop-gap measure, he had dragged over the plaid easy chair to break the picture's fall. But now as he sat at the kitchen table with the morning newspaper spread out in front of him, Bullock decided it would be a pleasant surprise for good old Mavis to come back from the hairdresser's and the grocery shopping to find her mother rehung.

Bullock was halfway out of his chair when an item in the paper caught his eye. Yesterday at the funeral of that Canadian legend, Mrs. Doris Adelaide, some nut waving a briefcase tried to break through the Prime Minister's security before escaping into the crowd of mourners. The Bullocks took a special interest in Mrs. Adelaide. She'd been the owner of their house until her prospering business required her to leave Sydenham Street for larger quarters. It saddened Bullock to see a crackpot disrupt the burial of a woman who had turned a personal tragedy into the stuff of empire. Stuff of empire? Bullock liked that. He wrote the words down in his pocket notebook and underlined them, resolving to use the phrase someday when he wrote the story of his own meteoric rise from his current post guarding the flowerbeds in front of the Parliament Buildings to that of RCMP Commissioner. Then he turned his thoughts back to Doris Adelaide.

One day twenty years ago, her husband went for a loaf of bread and never came back. Left with a three-year-old daughter to raise, the resourceful woman started a small catering operation, working out of her home. Calling her service Diplomatic Plates, she quickly earned a solid reputation catering embassy parties and affairs among Ottawa's international community. At her death, Diplomatic Plates was operating in every major capital of the world and Mrs. Adelaide was a millionaire many times over.

Bullock's musing was interrupted by the sound of the front door. Strange. It was too soon for Mavis to be back. Suddenly a man's voice called, "Honey, I'm home. You out in the kitchen?" A second later, a tall old man with a wrinkled face and uncertain eyes was standing in the doorway. He wore a floppy-brimmed tweed hat and carried a tan duffel coat over one arm and something large and round in a paper bag under the other. When he saw Bullock, the man's confusion changed to anger. "Who the hell are you?" he shouted. "Can't a man go for bread without his wife's damn boy friends sniffing around?"

By godfrey, thought Bullock, Mrs. Adelaide's barely laid to rest

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and the con men are already trooping in off the street claiming to be the long-lost husband. Well, this poor mutt was in for one big surprise. Bullock introduced himself, reinforcing his words by drawing the edge of a Stetson brim in the air with a forefinger. "And who are you?" he asked.

"I'm Norm—Norman Adelaide," said the man, giving Bullock the bag to hold while he searched unsuccessfully for identification. "Damned if I know where all the dumb furniture came from. But this is my house," he insisted. He looked down at the leather elbow-patches on his grey-tweed sportscoat. "And what's with the fuddy-duddy duds? I'm a sharp dresser. I have to be—I sell the stuff. I mean, would you buy a hand-painted tie from a guy rigged out like this? And, hey, where's my Doris?"

Bullock handed him the newspaper, still folded open at the funeral story. "Read all about it," he said and turned an admiring eye to the contents of the bag, a glossy-crusted, fine-smelling dark rye loaf the size of a curling stone.

The man started to read. Then he put a hand to his withered cheek and his eyes grew big. "My Doris dead?" he asked in an astonished whisper.

"Surprise, surprise, eh, Mr. Adelaide?" said Bullock. "Don't tell me, let me guess. There you were, toddling home with the bread under your arm, when you ran into this runty crowd with long beards and buckles on their hats. 'Come bowl a few lines,' they say. 'Have a drink from the keg,' they say. The next thing you know, you're rubbing the sleep out of your eyes and it's twenty years later. Well, Mr. Rip Van Winkle, your story doesn't hold water. Why?" Bullock slammed his fist down on the table. "Because that bread is fresh!"

"Hold your horses," said the man. "I mean, yeah, I went out for bread and, sure, here I am. I know all of that. But what about in between? And who gave me this?" He reached his hand behind his head and brought it back matted with blood.

Mrs. Adelaide's daughter Julie agreed over the phone that it might be better to meet the man who claimed to be her father on neutral ground. She jogged right over, a small, bright-eyed young woman in a fashionable athletic outfit, flush from her run along the Rideau Canal. She took a curious peek in at the man with the fresh bandage on his head, sitting at the kitchen table and looking around at everything as though it was incredible. "Maybe you're right, maybe

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he is a con man," she said as she followed Bullock into the living room. "I was too young to remember my father. But from this—" she handed Bullock a letter "—and from what you said on the phone, it sure sounds like him."

The envelope was inscribed, "To Julie. To be opened in the event of my death." Inside was a handwritten letter. "My darling child," it read, "the time has come for me to share with you the story of how your dear father came to us.

"Your grandmother and I were living in the Sydenham Street house at the time, she a bedridden widow and I her faithful nurse. One day I answered a knock on the front door and discovered a bewildered man holding a loaf of rye bread. All he could remember was that he was Norm Adelaide, a men's clothing salesman. I invited him in and made us a cup of tea. And that was how your father came to stay with us, first as a guest in the spare room and then, after he found employment at Polyester Village, as a paying boarder. Soon I was deeply in love, confident that beneath his coarse exterior and bad mouth lurked the soul of a prince.

"Yes, your blessed grandmother lived to see us joined in holy wedlock. For my part, only one thing marred the bliss of the next four years: the terrible shadow of your father's other, forgotten life and my fear that one day he might accidentally step back through the veil of memory into the arms of another woman with a prior claim on his heart. Since his disappearance, I have never lost the hope that one day he will return. But recently I've been haunted by the fear that death would come for me before Norman did. What if he returns to find me gone? Who will take care of him? When I confided all this to the Major, he suggested a provision in my will placing the sum of three million dollars in escrow for ten years for your father should he return. Please respect this final wish of one who will remain forever your departed mother."

"Three million's a nice piece of change, Miss Adelaide," observed Bullock.

"But how could a con man know about the bread and everything?" she insisted.

"This Major guy knew, whoever he is."

"Major Brisbane was Mother's financial advisor. Father saved the Major's life during the war. Then they lost touch. A few years back, the Major started tracking Father down and the trail led him to us. Helping Mother with the business end of Diplomatic Plates has been

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the Major's way of repaying his debt to Father. She'd never have gone worldwide without him in her corner."

"Any snapshots of your father?" asked Bullock hopefully.

"Mother said Father was a bit of a shutterbug," said Julie Adelaide. "So he was always taking the pictures and never in them. But Major Brisbane came across this one going through some old papers. He gave it to me yesterday at the funeral. I'm not sure it'll help." She handed him a photograph from her sweatshirt pocket.

Bullock stared at the likeness of a man in khaki battledress wearing a paratrooper's helmet. The face just might have been Norm Adelaide's but the air of quiet authority it projected most certainly belonged to somebody else. The inscription across the bottom read, *To Major Clifford Brisbane. Happy Landings! Lorne. 6.12.43.*

"Lorne?" demanded Bullock.

"The Major said it was Father's nickname in the service."

Bullock chewed on his moustache thoughtfully. "Any identifying marks or stuff like that?" he asked.

"Well, Mother did say he had this tattoo. A name and a series of numbers. She said she never asked him about it, which sounded strange. But I can see now she was afraid it might dredge up memories of his forgotten life."

"Well, here's a little trick of the trade that's worth a try," said Bullock. Sticking his head out into the hall, he called, "Hey, Norm, what kind of a tattoo you got?"

"Tattoo?" replied the old man from the kitchen. "Get off it! Only jerks have tattoos."

"There's still the Major," said Julie. "He'll know if it's Father or a con man. I phoned him right after you called. He's meeting us here."

During the night, a cold autumn rain had brought down most of the leaves and enlarged the sky. For Bullock, the brown puddles looked bitter, like tea steeped long enough to fur the teeth. Dressed in his worn old Mountie Academy windbreaker, he walked with the sure stride of a police officer about to wrap up a case of attempted fraud in jig time.

For a bit back there, he'd been afraid things were turning into another of those messy amnesia cases which are the bane of Canadian police work. Canada had always had a much larger amnesia rate than it cared to admit. The culprits were all those fat icicles hanging from every eave just waiting for a sudden warm spell in

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winter or the spring thaw to bring them crashing down. For the sake of tourism and foreign investment, the government tried to hush things up. But on moonless nights, Canadians turned from their television sets and whispered stories about the Isle of Forgotten Memories, a large internment camp in the Gulf of St. Lawrence where amnesiacs stood around blinking at each other like owls behind barbwire, not even remembering if they were anglophone or francophone. Other victims of memory loss were said to be warehoused in vacant skyscrapers in urban business districts, milling about sluggishly like guests at some Office Party of the Damned.

No, this wasn't amnesia. By godfrey, it was all too pat. Brisbane gets Doris Adelaide to leave her husband three million. Then she dies. Brisbane feeds the fake Norm Adelaide everything he needs to pull off the impersonation. Then Brisbane shows up and says, "Yep, that's Norm Adelaide, all right," and afterward he and the impostor meet around the corner to split the money. Smooth.

Bullock's only lead was the bag the bread had come in. He'd passed the Screaming Eagle bakery, with its distinctive sign showing the bird with open beak and outspread wings, many times. He'd often thought of stopping in to introduce himself to the owner. He liked to see Canada's native population succeed in the white man's world.

Bullock held the door for a black-bearded old man in a clerical cassock emerging from the shop carrying three loaves of dark rye under each arm. The man jingle-jangle-jingled as he passed. Bullock turned to watch him dump the loaves into the sidecar of the motorcycle at the curb. Strange. Bullock was almost sure he'd heard the sound of spurs. And a Mountie should know.

"May I help you, sir?" asked the small white-haired woman behind the counter when Bullock entered the shop.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Screaming Eagle."

This request seemed to confuse the woman. She stood there blinking until a stoop-shouldered old man with a sad face came out from the back. "That's okay, Millie," he said, taking her place at the counter. "I'm Lopky. I'm the owner," he said to Bullock. "What'll it be?"

"I expected a native Canadian," said Bullock.

"I get a lot of that," admitted Lopky. "Now what can I do you for?"

Bullock introduced himself, making his brim in the air with his forefinger. "An old guy bought a loaf of dark rye here earlier this morning. About my height and build."

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"Ordinary-looking in a shifty kind of way? An overcoat with toggles? A cut on the head?"

"That's him," said Bullock.

Lopky stepped back. "Millie, tell the man what you told me," he said.

The counterwoman looked uncomfortable in the limelight. "Well," she began, "I was working on the front-window display when I saw this gentleman get out of a taxi across the street. Suddenly the chauffeur of this beige limousine that'd pulled up behind the taxi jumped out and grabbed the gentleman's briefcase and hit him with a blackjack or whatever. That's when I fainted." She looked at Bullock and added, "Violence effects me like that." Then she looked at her boss. "Could I take a few minutes off to run some errands, Mr. Lopky?"

"Sure, sure, kid," said Lopky. "But take it easy, all right?"

They watched as the little woman put on a wool cardigan and left the shop. Then Lopky said, "So when I heard Millie hit the floor, I hustled out from the back. There was the limousine speeding away and there was this guy lying in the street. Well, he gets up and looks around like he wasn't sure where he was. Then he spies my shop and comes staggering over. 'Can I help you, sir?' I said, meaning could I get him something for the cut. 'Stow the guff,' he says, 'I want a loaf of your dark rye.' The chauffeur must have got his wallet, too, because he paid me with silver. Then he left. End of story."

"Ever seen the guy before?" asked Bullock.

"Maybe," said Lopky. "Something rings a bell. I don't work the counter much any more. It'd have to be from away back. The dark-rye days, I call them. The monks at St. Dalma are our only regular customers for dark rye now. But in my father's day we sold a lot. God knows where all the little tin-pot countries came from, but back then the upstairs over every shop around here was rented out to some European embassy or other. That's where the Screaming Eagle business comes from."

Lopky unhooked a framed photograph from the wall behind him and showed it to Bullock. A smiling man dressed in a uniform heavy with braid and medals and topped by a silver helmet was standing arm in arm with a short man in a white jacket and cap. "Prince Lazar von Stahlhelm, heir to the throne of Dalmatia, was his country's ambassador here," said Lopky. "He liked our dark rye so much he named Dad royal baker, with the right to use the Von Stahlhelm screaming-eagle emblem."

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The baker gave a sad smile. "Prince Lazar's son used to come by and pick up their daily loaf of rye all rigged out in this little uniform, just like his dad here, silver helmet and all. One day the kid marched out of here with his loaf of rye and a couple of minutes later—*boom!*—some anarchist bomb factory in the basement of a cigar store over on Sydenham blows up and takes half the street with it."

Bullock nodded. He knew the story well. His house was one of several built on the site of that explosion. Anarchist bomb factories must be as unlucky to live over as Indian graveyards.

Bullock left the shop wondering if the strongarm-chauffeur-stolen-briefcase business hadn't been a charade staged to support the amnesia story. As he turned the corner, he found Millie, the counter-woman from the bakery, waiting for him. "That was a lie back there about errands to run," she said, walking along with him. "It's hard to know who to trust these days. But if you can't trust a Mountie, who can you trust?"

Bullock couldn't argue with that.

"My name is Mrs. Millie Blakelock," she said. "My husband, Doctor Blakelock, vanished several years ago. Well, like I said, today he got out of that cab and gave this big smile when he saw me and started to wave. Then the blackjack hit." She dabbed her eyes with a tissue. "Poor Dr. Blakelock—I only hope they didn't get it."

"They?" asked Bullock.

"The oil interests."

"It?" asked Bullock.

"Dr. Blakelock's formula for making high-test gasoline from fallen sugar-maple leaves," she said. "He intends to make a gift of it to the people of Canada. Is it any wonder the oil interests started their attempts on his life? So we struck out for Ottawa, traveling in dark, unconventional ways. We were in a hobo jungle up north outside of Chapleau when my husband went into town to get a loaf of bread and never came back. So I came down here and got a job at the bakery, knowing if he was still alive he'd show up there sooner or later."

"How so?" asked Bullock.

"Because he just loves Screaming Eagle dark rye." She smiled, remembering. "He was even carrying a loaf of it the first time we met. I was living with my parents over on Sydenham and Dr. Blakelock arrived on the doorstep, rye bread, memory loss, and all. Talk about love at first sight! Knowing my parents would never approve,

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I closed the front door behind me, put my arm in Dr. Blakelock's arm, and never looked back. I understand my parents sold the house a few years later to the parents of what's-her-name, the multi-millionairess whose funeral was on television yesterday afternoon. That's how I knew Doctor Blakelock was in town. I saw him try to rush the Prime Minister and give him the formula. You can be sure the oil interests saw it, too."

From her purse she pulled out an antique gold hand-mirror and said, "Here's something else that made me think he'd come to the bakery." The screaming eagle engraved on the back matched the one on the bakery sign. "This was Dr. Blakelock's most prized possession," she said. "He'd stare at the eagle by the hour with this puzzled look, like he was trying hard to remember something, poor dear. Not that being married to an amnesiac's any bed of roses, either. Off he'd go for bread and be gone for years at a crack. After one long absence during the War, he told me he'd only just escaped from the Germans, who intended to shoot him as a spy until he hinted about his ersatz gasoline."

"I've kind of got my hands full right now, Mrs. Blakelock," said Bullock. "But what can I do for you?"

The woman gestured over her shoulder. A beige limousine was following them at a distance. "I'm afraid the oil interests have me staked out. So if you run across Dr. Blakelock in the course of your travels, please tell him not to come back there looking for me. Tell him I love him but I'm walking out of his life rather than put it at risk. If I'm lucky, I can lead the bad guys on a wild goose chase and Dr. Blakelock will be free to continue his wonderful work."

"Let's see if I can't settle this little matter here and now," said Bullock, stepping into the street and striding back toward the limousine. The limousine shifted into reverse and backed away as quickly as he came. When Bullock stopped, the limousine stopped. Bullock pointed at the big "M" on his Mountie Academy windbreaker and crooked a beckoning finger. The limousine didn't move. Bullock shrugged theatrically and turned as if to walk away. Then he dashed forward at full tilt. But the limousine sped smoothly backward, maintaining the distance between them until Bullock stopped, panting from the effort. "Blast," he said under his breath and got back onto the sidewalk.

Mrs. Blakelock had followed him up the street. "Well, I'm off to give notice," she said, heading back in the direction of the bakery.

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"But I won't leave nice Mr. Lopky in the lurch. I'll give him till noon to find a replacement."

Suddenly Bullock thought of something and called after her, "Does Dr. Blakelock have a tattoo?"

"Why, yes, now that you ask," she said. "An old girl friend's name and phone number. She was called Geneva. The number I forget. As often as I scrubbed the good Doctor's back, I never brought her up. When it comes to the other woman, let sleeping dogs lie is my motto."

Bullock stood there scratching his head. What if the man who claimed to be Norm Adelaide had a tattoo, too, but didn't know he did? What if it was somewhere he couldn't see and no one ever told him about it?

Bullock was halfway home with the beige limousine on his tail when he remembered another screaming eagle: the weathervane atop the onion-shaped dome of the nearby Monastery of St. Dalma. Bullock changed direction. It was a long shot, but perhaps some of the answers to this puzzling case could be found within those hallowed walls.

When Bullock reached the monastery, he asked to see the man in charge. The thickset, scar-faced monk who opened the door grabbed a fistful of windbreaker and hauled him inside. Bullock was spun around, slammed up against the wall, and given a quick professional frisk. Then the monk grabbed more windbreaker and, holding it high, rushed the protesting Mountie down a long corridor where cowled figures paced, some reading from fat prayerbooks, some from soldier-of-fortune magazines. Along the way, a monk emerged from a room and through the closing door Bullock caught a glimpse of the monk he'd seen earlier at the bakery. The man was sitting there cleaning a large service revolver of the kind called horse pistols.

Bullock and his fast-stepping guide came out into an open courtyard and crossed to the monastery chapel. Inside the vestibule, a narrow flight of steps led up to a carved door. The monk knocked, and when a voice answered he pushed Bullock through into a circular windowless room shaped like the inside of an onion.

A very old and incredibly thin priest teetered to his feet behind a small antique desk whose lamp was the room's only illumination. "Thank you, Brother Fingers," he said dismissively and nodded to Bullock, who gladly slammed the door in the monk's face.

The old man offered Bullock a chair and sank slowly back into

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his own, all the while studying his visitor from beneath bushy eyebrows. Was the look one of guile or merely cautious wisdom? Bullock wondered.

"I am Father Cosmus, Abbot of St. Dalma," said the priest. "How may I help you?" When Bullock explained why he'd come, the old man shook his head. "The names Blakelock and Adelaide mean nothing to me," he said. "May I ask how you came to think they might?"

In the midst of Bullock's description of the hand-mirror, the old priest lay a finger on his lips and rose slowly and carefully as though his bones were not connected but merely stacked one atop the other. Gliding over to the door like a juggler hurrying to keep beneath his juggling, he jerked it open suddenly, but no ear listened on the other side. Then he juggled his way back, acknowledging Bullock's look of admiration with a modest bow.

The old priest sat down again. "The object you describe is one of a pair of identical hand-mirrors which were added to the Von Stahlhelm Regalia in the early part of this century," he said.

"At the outbreak of World War I, King Sigmund, the first of the House of Von Stahlhelm to mount the Spotted Throne of Dalmatia, put the country's gold reserves someplace for safe keeping and forgot where. A fascist element among the Royal Dalmatian Mounted Zouaves, as the palace guard were named, staged a coup. King Sigmund was defenestrated."

Bullock could tell from Father Cosmus's expression that this wasn't a pleasant thing to have happen to you. "Ah," he commiserated.

The old priest nodded gravely. Then he smiled in spite of himself and exclaimed, "Ah, what a uniform those Zouaves had! A short yellow vest embroidered with blue, baggy scarlet pants, boots with curly toes, and a blue fez with a scarlet tassel. What could be more splendid?"

Bullock bit his tongue and said nothing. But inwardly he scoffed at curly-toed boots and fezes, especially fezes because they lacked a manly brim.

"Well, within the week King Sigmund's heir, Prince Lazar, died when an unrelated explosion destroyed our Ottawa embassy," continued Father Cosmus. "But to this day there are stories that Prince Lazar's son, Prince Lorne, escaped the blast by a matter of seconds and wandered off in a state of shock."

"Prince Lorne?" asked Bullock quickly.

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"Because Prince Lazar's son was born here, he named him Lorne after a Canadian governor-general."

"Any chance this Prince Lorne guy's still alive?" asked Bullock.

"Oh, I hardly think so," the old priest assured him. "Just consider the forces aligned against him. Many of the Zouaves who fled Dalmatia after World War II ended up here in this very monastery. And not all chose the monastic life to atone for their sins. Some use us to mask the criminal operations that finance their hunt for Prince Lorne, the last of the line that beggared their country.

"Then there's the Communist secret police, who use Air Dalmatia, the national airline, as their cover to scour Canada for the Prince because they think his father tattooed the location of the missing gold reserves on his body when he was a baby.

"And what about the Iron Wimple, a terrorist sisterhood of excommunicated nuns who pray the Devil's Rosary, an ammunition belt with steel-cased bullets for aves and dum-dums for paters, and hate the Von Stahlhelms for distributing large convent landholdings among the peasants. No, it would be more than a miracle if Prince Lorne has survived this long."

Bullock headed for home, trying to sort out the trickier aspects of the case. Why, for example, were there *two* hand-mirrors in the Von Stahlhelm Regalia? And what kind of a game was Major Brisbane playing in the whole business? By the time he turned off onto Sydenham, the beige limousine behind him was being followed by the monastery motorcycle with Brother Fingers behind the handlebars and the monk with the horse pistol in the sidecar. Looking back over his shoulder at his growing entourage, Bullock almost collided with two nuns carrying metal suitcases. "Good morning, Sisters," he said cheerily and turned up the walk to his house.

Miss Adelaide, the man who called himself Norm Adelaide, and Major Brisbane were in the living room. The Major had a face the color of a flowerpot and a full, well shaped white moustache. The two steps he took to shake Bullock's hand revealed a pronounced limp.

"Julie says you don't believe this man is Norm Adelaide," he said. "Well, he is. And I should know. He was with me in the screw-up that cost me my drumstick. Ten of us parachuted into a German trap. The others were killed. And I wouldn't be here to tell the tale if Adelaide hadn't lugged me all the way to the pickup point."

"Norm Adelaide has this rule. He don't make parachute jumps,"

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insisted Adelaide. "But, hey, I was in the War. It was the craziest damn thing. All of a sudden I came to in this rubber dinghy full of German sailors with my head aching to beat the band. The road signs said we'd landed somewhere downriver from Quebec City. We spent the night sneaking around stealing armloads of dead sugar-maple leaves and rowing them back out to a cargo submarine. The first chance I got, I slipped away in the darkness. Weird, right? But better than jumping out of airplanes."

Brisbane looked at Bullock and shrugged. "So he's got a touch of amnesia. I still want him to get what's coming to him."

"You're not the only one," said Bullock, pointing out to the street where a white mini-van decorated all over with the distinctive black pawprints of Air Dalmatia had pulled up behind the limousine and motorcycle. Inside, a dozen scowling flight stewards were drinking from those little bottles airlines use to serve alcohol.

Bullock furrowed his brow and searched for a clever plan to get Adelaide away from the house safely.

The man wearing the duffel coat and tweed hat hurried up Sydenham. At the corner, he struck out in a westerly direction, keeping his head down so that no one in the caravan of vehicles behind him—which now included two nuns on a tandem bicycle—would catch on that he wasn't Norm Adelaide.

Bullock's plan was to lead everyone on a merry chase before vanishing into thin air, leaving them to scratch their chins in sheepish bafflement. But then it occurred to him that if he mopped up things a little faster, maybe he could reunite the Blakelocks before Millie disappeared. So he quickened his pace.

He turned off onto a side street. The limousine and the monks' motorcycle followed right along, heading the wrong way on a one-way street. Perhaps the Air Dalmatia van and the nuns suspected a trick. They sped on by.

Halfway up the street, a passageway led between two apartment buildings. Bullock decided to spring for it. At least he'd lose the limousine. But he'd hardly turned off among the ashcans, fire escapes, and cellar steps when the Air Dalmatia van came tearing up the service alley that ran parallel to the street and blocked his way. Behind him, the monks on the motorcycle wheeled into the passageway and roared toward him, driving all out.

Bullock's only way out was up. He jumped onto a dumpster and, leaping as high as he could, he managed to grab onto the iron steps

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projecting straight out from the fire-escape landing above him and swing his body up and out of the way. By godfrey, he thought, it was just like in the movies. But then to his horror, the steps plunged, pulled down by the weight of his body. The driver of the motorcycle, swerving to avoid the steps, sheared off the sidecar on the iron post at the top of a cellar stairway. The sidecar's swift descent down the cement steps came to an abrupt end at the cellar door. The shock of hitting the railing drove the motorized half of the motorcycle back into the path of the descending stairs just as the bottom step hit the ground. Suddenly Brother Fingers found himself on a bumpy upward road that ended in a cartwheeling arc when he hit the iron railing at the end of the second-floor landing. The falling motorcycle plowed through the roof of the Air Dalmatia van. Both gas tanks exploded and the van erupted into a fireball.

Bullock's mouth fell open in disbelief. He turned from the fiery wreckage to share his astonishment with the limousine, which had pulled up to block the entrance of the passageway. That was when the chauffeur, who was now outside crouched down behind the hood, started firing at him with an assault rifle while the passenger in the back seat joined in the gunplay, firing a small pistol with considerable accuracy. Bullock dove for a rank of garbage cans while bullets whizzed and clanged around him.

Looking around for better cover, he saw the two crouching nuns setting up a light machine-gun on a low tripod in the passageway beyond the burning van. By godfrey, a Mountie needed eyes in the back of his head! Or at least one of those little rearview mirrors to clip onto the brim of the Stetson like cyclists wear on their helmets.

Rearview mirrors? That was it! That was why there were two hand-mirrors—so Prince Lorne could read the number of the Swiss bank account tattooed on his back! Before Bullock could ponder this discovery, the nuns started firing. He bolted from behind the garbage cans and made a dash for the stairwell where the motorcycle sidecar had made its final descent.

The chauffeur chose this moment to vault over the hood of the limousine, his weapon blazing. A machine-gun bullet intended for the scampering Bullock got the chauffeur in the knee and he fell to the ground. The passenger jumped from the limousine, firing as he came. Running low among the garbage cans, the man reached the chauffeur and started dragging him back toward the limousine.

"Good godfrey!" said Bullock, stopping dead in his tracks, the bullets whining all around him. He recognized the man. It was the

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Premier of Alberta, Canada's oil-rich province. Instinctively, Bullock came to attention and saluted. The Premier paused only long enough to snap off two quick shots at him that were wide of the mark. Then he tumbled the wounded chauffeur into the limousine, got behind the wheel, and roared off down the street.

Bullock snatched up the chauffeur's assault rifle to give back a bit of what he was getting. But then he hesitated. He could see the headlines now: MOUNTIE KILLS NUNS IN FIREFIGHT—A FIRST FOR THE FORCE.

Just then he heard the fire engine. The nuns heard it, too. They scrambled to their feet and disappeared around the corner, the one with the machine-gun cradled in her arms firing as she went.

Bullock left the carnage before the authorities arrived and headed home to call Julie Adelaide and make sure her father was safe. But when he stepped onto his veranda, he saw an old man sitting on the living-room chesterfield who, instead of a hat, wore the ornamental brass coal scuttle from the fireplace-set his Aunt Irene gave them as a wedding present. What the—? wondered Bullock as he went inside.

The face beneath the scuttle was Norm Adelaide's minus the cynical mouth, the shifty eyes, and the sharpster's chin and ears. In their place was a noble presence and a gaze both compassionate and approving.

"Come, you may approach us," said the man beneath the scuttle, adding with a smile, "we will not bite you." When Bullock hesitated, Major Brisbane spoke from a chair in the corner. "Your Highness, may I present your host, Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock. Bullock, Prince Lorne von Stahlhelm."

Protocol had been an elective at the Mountie Academy. Bullock had opted for bare-knuckles boxing instead. Still, he managed a bow from the waist before coming into the room. "Where's Miss Adelaide?" he asked the Major.

"I sent her to get this fake beard with the ear hooks I used when I was in Army Reconnaissance and Reconnoiter," said Brisbane. "For smuggling Adelaide into the car. Well, earlier he'd been complaining of this headache, but we couldn't find the aspirin. So he stuck his head out the window to get her to stop for some and wham! the sash slammed down on the old noggin. Enter the rightful claimant to the Spotted Throne."

"No," the Prince assured them, "we have no more pretensions in

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that direction and are content with more ancient Von Stahlhelm titles." Looking at Bullock, he raised his eyes and added, "Please forgive our borrowing this handy substitute for our helmet."

Bullock bowed again. "Your Highness," he said, "here's something you won't often hear out of a Mountie's mouth. I almost envy you all the lives you've lived and all the extraordinary things you've done."

The Prince bowed modestly. "We like to think," he said, "that perhaps we have achieved our family's goal and become the ideal constitutional ruler, being both Prince and people combined. Our principality is somewhat of a mixed bag, from the unsavory Mr. Adelaide and the altruistic Dr. Blakelock to many other minor characters whom we love no less for their insignificance. We watch over them all and when we sense they are in danger, such as at this moment, we come to the fore to protect them."

"Adelaide was never in any danger, Your Highness," said Brisbane, who, the ruddiness of his face deeper now, was standing, pointing an automatic at the Prince's chest. "I've nothing against him. It's you I've been after all these years. You're why I suggested Doris set aside the money for her husband. I figured it would keep Adelaide around for a while if he ever did come back. I knew sooner or later you'd show up, too."

"We are afraid we do not understand, Major," said the Prince, getting out of his chair.

Brisbane kept his eyes on the Prince, but his words were for Bullock. "My orders were to join up with Dalmatian partisans and coordinate their work behind the German lines. We parachuted in Princy here the night before in a Royal Dalmatian Mounted Zouave uniform. He spoke the lingo. His job was to make contact with the partisans and bring them to the jump site. Instead, he brought the Germans. My men were dead before they hit the ground."

"All we remember is the jump and the rush of a tree limb out of the darkness," said the Prince.

"Don't try that routine on me, you bastard!" shouted Brisbane. "You didn't have amnesia! You damn well remembered the time and place of the jump and where the partisan camp was. And don't tell me they tortured it out of you. I was dragging myself away through the underbrush when I saw you as big as life and happy as a clam with a sponge and a bucket of sudsy water, washing a German staff car and humming 'Ramona' at the top of your voice!"

The Prince furrowed his brow. "We remember nothing of that,"

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he said. But then he gave a quick noise of discovery. "Ah, we think we know what might have happened! You see, lest we forget, we jot down critical things like times and places on our cuff—which is so obvious a place that no one ever thinks of looking there. Besides, it is hidden by our sleeve. But the Zouave uniform has a sleeveless vest instead of a jacket. The Germans must have found our jottings when they discovered our unconscious body."

Brisbane cocked an eyebrow and turned to see if Bullock found this explanation as outlandish as he did.

Snatching the coal scuttle in both hands, the Prince brought it crashing down on Brisbane's head. The man dropped his weapon and stood there, stunned and weaving unsteadily on his one good leg, blood streaming down his face. When he started to pitch forward, Bullock grabbed him under the arms. "I've got to get the Major to the hospital, Your Highness," he said. "I won't be long. Sit over there and don't show yourself at the windows. You still have enemies everywhere."

"The Defenders of Yesterday? The Mail Fist?" asked the Prince.

"The Iron Wimple. Air Dalmatia," replied Bullock. He left the Prince in the plaid easy chair, examining the dent Brisbane's head had made in the coal scuttle.

Bullock didn't have to commandeer a passing vehicle. He and Brisbane reached the curb just as Julie Adelaide drove up in the Major's car with the fake beard on the dashboard. Explaining about the Prince as quickly as he could, Bullock sent her inside to take care of him and drove Brisbane to the hospital.

While he waited for the doctor to do the necessary repairs, Bullock called headquarters to report on the events of the morning. Inspector LaPierre's reaction to his charges against the Premier of Alberta and the gunplay in the alley was long and loud. As he stood there in the phonebooth, drumming his fingertips, whistling drily, and looking down at the squawking receiver, it crossed Bullock's mind that maybe he'd slammed the front door when he left the house.

With Brisbane in custody, Bullock returned home, where he found an anxious Julie Adelaide pacing up and down.

"Boy, did I do a stupid thing," she said. "I came inside, and there was the Prince guy or Father or whoever nursing a real bump on the head and trying to clean up the glass from a broken picture-frame on the floor. He stood up and introduced himself, smiling as best he could. 'I'm Dr. Blakelock,' he said. 'Are you the lady of the

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house?' I tried to explain the situation, and confusing as it sounded to me it didn't seem to phase him a bit. Then he said, 'Mrs. Blakelock and I always like to do odd jobs to pay for hospitality. Can I wash your car?' When I said there wasn't a car at the house at the moment he said, 'Then I'll just go outside and rake the leaves.' 'Fine,' I said. 'I'll tidy up here and then maybe we can have a cup of tea.' So off he went to get the rake, humming 'Ramona' at the top of his voice. Half an hour later, he stuck his head in the kitchen door and said, 'You know what'd go nice with tea? Some dark rye. My treat.' 'Hey, fine,' I said, not thinking. That was an hour ago and he isn't back yet."

Bullock looked at his watch. It was well after one o'clock. The Blakelocks would be united and long gone from Ottawa by now. "Well, don't reproach yourself, Miss Adelaide," he said. "Perhaps this is the best ending to the whole business."

As he walked her out to the street, Bullock described the morning's adventures, concluding, "We'll have to drop the charges against Major Brisbane, of course. But after today, he and the others will be licking their wounds for a bit, you can count on that. And it could take them years to get back on the trail of Prince Lorne and his principality. As for Norm Adelaide, I suspect he'll show up again one day, and when he does I'll bet he'll find a loving daughter waiting for him."

He stood waving until Julie Adelaide had jogged out of sight. Heading back up the walk, he noticed the plastic leaf bag hanging from a lower limb of the sugar-maple tree. While he watched, a drop of clear liquid formed at a pinhole puncture on the bottom and fell into an old two-quart canning jar somebody'd brought up from down cellar.

Bullock put the jar to his nose. By godfrey, it was high-test gasoline! Dr. Blakelock's formula worked! As Bullock stood there, a whole bright Canadian future paraded before his eyes. He saw happy, well fed families with the ruddy glow of autumn in their cheeks, rank on rank of singing millionaires armed with rakes and bushel baskets, marching out into the forest to harvest this great replenishable natural resource.

He saw sugar-maple auctions in every exotic bazaar around the world, bales of the finest leaf admired and haggled over. And he saw Canada's statesmen, now representatives of the greatest economic power in creation, sitting down with the world leaders to bring some

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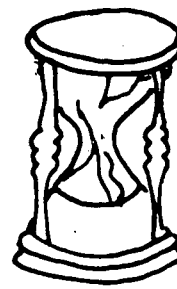
good old clear-eyed Canadian initiative and common sense to the tangled affairs of man.

Bullock smiled and turned back to the house. It occurred to him that perhaps he should try to catch up with Dr. Blakelock. But he was consoled by the thought that he'd already accomplished more in a morning than most men do in a week. And on his day off, too.



DETECTIVERSE

ODE TO JESSICA FLETCHER

by ANITA FRANKE

Jessica Fletcher is my ideal,
Even though she isn't real.
I like her coiffe, I like her clothes,
I like the way she strikes a pose.
I like her heart, she's always kind,
She has a keen, inquiring mind.
She faces danger with a smile,
Willing to walk that extra mile.
To find the culprit who did the crime,
She sacrifices her personal time.
Law and order would have no clout
If Jess wasn't there to help them out.
To be like her was really my scheme,
But now I think it's an impossible dream,
For Jess is truly a superwoman
And I, alas, am only human.

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a distinguished reprint by

JOHN le CARRÉ

In the January 28, 1967 Saturday Evening Post *there appeared a superb story by the masterful John le Carré that was nominated for an Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America for best mystery short story of the year. It has taken us literally years to manage to obtain the reprint rights to the story and we're delighted to be able to bring it to you in this special 50th Anniversary Issue.*

Some time back in Publishers Weekly, *an interviewer wrote: "Le Carré is quite content to live in Britain, where he is probably in the highest income-tax bracket ('Every ten hours I work, nine go to the Queen'), a situation he shrugs off. 'I'm an English family man. My wife and I have relatives in England. The English didn't throw me out when I was poor, and they're not going to throw me out when I'm rich. I enjoy the choreography of English society. I like the sound of the language. I enjoy observing English behavior. They're all marvelous things to put on one's palette.'"*

And what a palette is that of the creator of George Smiley . . .!

DARE I WEEP? DARE I MOURN?

by JOHN le CARRÉ

In the ancient German city of Lubeck, there was no finer grocer than Herr Koorp. He lived with his narrow wife in a narrow street where gables touched like inquisitive noses. His shop smelled of spices and good traditions, of smoked ham and reverent prosperity. At Christmas he put marzipan pigs in the window and, at Easter, wheaten cakes and a loaf of bread thickly varnished with egg yolk.

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On Saturdays he walked up the narrow street from his shop to his new aluminum garage; there, with a soft leather, he would clean his fine Mercedes car.

It was a Mercedes of unusual build—a Mercedes with a wooden back like a cupboard. He used it to deliver groceries to all the fine people in Lubeck: to the senators, the mayor, to the lawyers and merchants, and they recognized his worth because he had a fine Mercedes.

On Sunday mornings he wore a black hat with the brim turned up all around, and he floated to church on his wife's thin arm. On Sunday evenings he drove to the soccer match or to the meeting of refugees from the lost territories of the East. He was a fat, glossy, tidy man, quite nimble. His hands, when not in use, curled lightly inward, thumb and middle finger touching as if they were holding a needle. When they wrapped your coffee, they deftly flicked the package round and round, and you wondered at the delicacy of such a large man.

Sometimes—once or twice a year, perhaps—he would make a speech to a gathering of refugees in Lubeck. He would stand alone on the big Gothic platform between the electric candles, while his wife, her thin body pressed into the white ruffs and stiff lace of her Silesian costume, sat below him, as in church with the leading citizens of Lubeck.

His speech never varied. First (with indignation) he referred to the loss of his homeland; then (with discernible grief) to the plight of his father and his sister, who still lived in the East. Did not his sister write weekly, begging for good western coffee and the comfort of a warm coat? Had not his father applied innumerable times to be united with his fortunate son in Lubeck? Herr Koorp's protest over, he made (with ominous vigor) his claim. He was demanding, he would say, for all German people what was already the right of the most minor African tribe: self-determination. And the German people, he would have them know, was no mere African tribe. When he sat down, the leading citizens of Lubeck applauded, and his wife's narrow face brightened with color and her eyes shone as if from the cold. Herr Koorp was making his mark.

He was a meticulous man: meticulous as he took his knife and beheaded his egg at twenty minutes past eight that morning in early January; meticulous as he put down his spoon and with surgical

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precision slit open the letter from Mohndorf with the picture of Ulbricht on the stamp.

"It's from your sister," his wife said.

"Begging, I suppose," Herr Koorp replied. He read a line.

"They're never afraid of asking," his wife said.

"It's about Father," he said.

"I suppose he's ill," his wife said. Her father-in-law was capable of almost any act of inconsideration.

Herr Koorp laid the letter beside the open egg. "He's dead," Herr Koorp said, and glanced at the commercial calendar hanging on the newly papered wall. "He's been dead three days."

He began crying, little-boy tears, holding the letter away from him. There were several pages, and he had not even finished the first. Frau Koorp took the letter from him and read it. She read it once slowly, as if she were checking figures, then suspiciously, as if it were a devious legal document, then a third time, but distractedly, as an aid to other thoughts. "He wants to be buried over here," she said. "In Lubeck," she added. "He wants *us* to do it." She took a sip of coffee. "He wants a grave in Western soil. It was his dying wish."

She looked out of the window at the tall roofs of Lubeck. Standing up, Herr Koorp wiped his chin and walked into his shop. "It's a tragedy," he said. Beside the till was a rack of ties, a special line he had recently introduced as an experiment. Such things were often worth a try at Christmas. They were priced at twelve marks eighty. He selected a black one, counted the money from his purse into the till (for he was a meticulous man who liked everything in order), and returned to the dining room. "From now on," he said, "we're in mourning." He might have been launching a ship.

"He wants to be buried here," his wife said again. Herr Koorp sat down limply, his thoughts upon his youth.

"He wants to be buried here," she repeated.

"It would never be allowed," Herr Koorp replied, hearing her for the first time. "Too many formalities." He shook his head. "It's too late."

She said nothing.

"Winter transport is unreliable. The train would be delayed at the border," he said, and she, his ally for once, echoed, "A train would be most unreliable."

"We must send some flowers," Herr Koorp declared, making an

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end of the matter, and with a sigh returned to his egg before it was entirely cold.

"He could come by car," Frau Koorp suggested.

"Never."

"Why not?"

"Never get permission. It would take weeks to get permission. Poor man." He swallowed some egg mournfully, filled with a sense of loss. "It wouldn't be legal," he said, for Herr Koorp was a meticulous man and valued the law highly.

"If we had the funeral in Lubeck," Frau Koorp continued with a musing, reminiscent expression much softer than her usual scowl, "everyone would come." Her eyes were on the roofs of Lubeck. "The senate. The mayor. The corporations. The societies. All the refugees would come. It would be a patriotic duty. They'd have flags," she said. "They'd have a band. All Lubeck would come. Your father would be treated as a hero, do you realize that? And so would you," she said, "if you went and fetched him."

"Fetch him? Fetch him from Mohndorf?" Herr Koorp had shaken off his grief. "You're mad!" he said. "You're absolutely mad!"

She would not help him that morning. She left him to rant alone, to goad himself, her back turned to him while she studied the roofs of Lubeck. "You're off your head," Herr Koorp said. "You know nothing. I told you: they'd have to apply! You know nothing of conditions over there! Take the car to Mohndorf? The Mercedes? The authorities would never give permission."

"Your sister suggests it. Your sister writes it in the letter. She's made the application."

"Made an application? Christina made an application without my knowledge? She expects *me* to drive? Who does she think she is?" he shouted and banged his flat hand on the table. "Ordering *me* about, making applications in *my* name? Three hundred kilometers on rotten roads? On icy, rotten roads? In January? For a body? Has she forgotten we are free over here?"

"No one is free," his wife replied, "when duty is involved." She stabbed the letter with her finger. "Duty to the dead," she said, and whispered to the roofs: "They make a wreath. I've seen them. Two or three meters high. From all the refugees. They come in costume," she said. "I can wear my costume. Everyone comes." She turned to face him. "You go and get him," she said with absolute assurance. "Bring him here to me. In the Mercedes. You go today."

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"But the permission!" Herr Koorp screamed, taunted beyond bearing by the sheer romantic folly of a woman. "Do you not hear me? Permission has to be granted! By the Eastern authorities! It could take weeks! Months!"

"They've already granted it. Your sister says so in the letter."

After a very long time Herr Koorp said, "Who'll look after the shop?" The bluster had quite gone.

"Close it," she said. "Out of respect. Respect for the dead. You said it yourself: we're in mourning."

It was nightfall when Herr Koorp arrived in Mohndorf. The town where his childhood was had not changed for thirty years. He reversed along the cobblestone street and parked in the familiar alley. As he got out of the Mercedes, he looked at the house and the one light burning in the upstairs window, where his father's bedroom was. They had draped the entrance to the house with bunting, blackout material from the war. The alley was quiet as a field. The people might have been forbidden the streets, but he felt the eyes of his neighbors upon him and guessed the secret faces looking out.

They've probably never seen a Mercedes, he thought.

He should have brought things for the family. He should have brought them coffee and chocolate and soap and all the things that had mattered in the war and mattered still in this shabby, backward town. The journey had gone far better than he had dared expect. It was relaxing with so little traffic. Especially in the Mercedes. Nor was he as frightened as he thought he'd be—so rich among the poor.

He pressed the bell and heard nothing, so he banged the knocker. The paint was peeling from the door; as he knocked, flakes settled like snow on the steps. It's a disgrace, he thought—my own front door. That was his sister, Christina: sloppy, no sense of order.

He heard her footsteps coming toward the door. I'll take him tonight, he thought. I'm not going to sleep in this place; it's certain to be damp. Open shop tomorrow; can't afford to lose trade. That's what he'd tell her, not that she'd understand. Christina had never given a damn for money. No respect for property, that was her trouble. She's just like a Communist, he thought. No wish to better herself.

But it wasn't Christina who opened the door.

It was Dr. Sandel—Klaus Sandel. The same thoughtful child he'd sat with at school, the same baby face and unruly hair. "Well done," the doctor said, keeping his voice low. "Well done," he repeated,

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shaking Koorp's wet hand and closing the door quickly to keep the cold away. "Did you have difficulty?" he asked. He helped Koorp out of his coat, stroking the lapel enviously with his hand. "No trouble at the border?"

"No trouble," Koorp replied. The hall, the parlor, the kitchen—all were in darkness.

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs," the doctor said. "She doesn't like to leave him."

"There three days?" asked Koorp. "She's been with him three days?"

"All the time," the doctor said, and led the way upstairs.

Three days, Koorp thought. She'd never shown her father that much respect before. They stopped in front of the closed door. A single light burned over the landing.

"What about you?" Koorp said suddenly.

"I?" Doctor Sandel asked.

"What are you doing here?"

"Helping," Doctor Sandel said. "As any friend would."

"Have you been here three days, too?"

"Off and on."

"You ought to marry her," Koorp said. "It isn't respectable after all this time. Was it his heart?" Koorp himself suffered from passing pains in the chest.

"His heart was always bad," the doctor replied.

"Did you know he was dying?"

"Of course," the doctor said.

"Did he?"

"How else would he have told us about the funeral?" He was not looking at Koorp any more, but at his own hand upon the handle of the door.

"You ought to marry her," Koorp repeated. "You owe it to her."

Sandel opened the door.

The candles were at the head of the bed, one on each side of the old man. He was dressed in his black suit, the suit he wore for weddings. His hands were on his breast, like an effigy. They must have shaved him, Koorp thought—his face is all smooth, like a child's. Christina was in the rocking chair beside the window. She was wearing her everyday clothes, an old khaki dress and long, ribbed socks like a schoolgirl's. "If it isn't Dietrich," she said. She had never grown up, of course.

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He knelt beside the bed, the tears breaking, and bowed his head to the smooth linen sheet. I've deserved this, he thought. I treated him badly. I was selfish and mean, and I shall be next if the pains in my chest get worse. He felt a resentment that he had ever been born. He was frightened and moved. The tears were running on his knuckles. His heart was thumping against his ribs. I'm dying, he thought. It could be now. Tonight.

He heard Christina getting up and shuffling across the room. She never prayed like this, he thought, Christina and her atheist lover. He turned to look at her. She was standing beside Sandel, arm in arm. They were grinning, grinning at a stricken son who kneels at the body of his father. "You can laugh," he said. "You never loved him."

As he spoke, he felt the movement of the bed and the sliding of the linen and heard the creaking of the springs as his father sat up.

He saw it in fragments: the black trouser legs splayed on the white sheet, the stupid mouth half open, the stupid eyes alight. He felt it in fragments: the embrace, the soapy baby cheek, the clumsy hands caressing Koorp's back, the tremble of the old frail body. He heard it in fragments: Christina's laugh, then Sandel's, then Christina again, and the old man's wheeze like a tremble on a faulty piano wire. They had always laughed at Koorp—laughed at his cowardice and his precision, laughed at the cautious way he had preserved his clothes and polished his shoes and brushed his hair and wrapped himself against the winter's cold. They had laughed at his early dignity and his attachment to the law, laughed at his monetary caution. Laughing still, they guided and pushed him down the dark staircase, Christina running ahead with the candles to set them on the table, for the feast.

And such a feast it was. He did not know that they could get such food: a whole ham, as good as any he had tasted in Lubeck. As good as any he had sold. Butter! God, how many times had they complained they had no butter? And the bread. It was sour, certainly, blacker than he cared for himself, but for the East more than adequate. They must have been buying on the black market especially for the occasion. They must have spent a fortune.

And how pleased they were with themselves; how cleverly they had worked out their plan! It was the old man who had thought of it; apparently thought of it all by himself. It must have been the first clever idea his stupid brain had ever conceived. It was so simple,

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he explained. Sandel had issued a death certificate. (And Sandel is the best doctor in the town! If Sandel says you are dead, you are certainly dead!) Christina had obtained an export license and a health certificate. "You see?" the old man said. "It was done all the time in the war. All sorts of things were smuggled in coffins. No one likes to look in a coffin."

Koorp sat there, letting them talk.

"Why are *you* so gloomy?" the old man asked. "Would you rather have me dead?" The table shook to their laughter, and the candles flickered in the chill air.

"Don't you want to take me back to Lubeck?"

"Of course he doesn't," Christina said. "It isn't legal."

"But he will," Sandel said. Koorp remembered now: Sandel was a very arrogant young man. "He's got to. They let him in to get a body. He can't go home without one."

"They'd say he was a spy."

"A smuggler."

"A saboteur."

"An American saboteur!" Sandel said. They had drunk quite a lot by then. "It's the only way out, Dietrich."

"After all, Dietrich put us up to it, didn't he?" Christina said. "That's what they're bound to say. They always do." She poured out the wine, a half glass only for her father because he was so fragile. "The wicked westerner," she said, "with his Mercedes. He put us up to it."

The coffin fitted very nicely. They laid it with the head forward by the driving seat. "I want to be near the engine!" the old man had said. It was after midnight.

"You'll have to open the coffin every half hour," Sandel said. "To let him breathe. You've got a screwdriver?"

No lights were burning in the town as Herr Koorp set off along the western route. He didn't see another car for hours.

The day broke grey and dark. Herr Koorp drove slowly at first, distrusting the night frost upon the cobblestones, then gradually increased his speed as his confidence returned. The Mercedes was running beautifully, sleek and straight despite the pitted surface, as if glad of the journey and the morning air, and glad of that bit of extra weight that kept the back wheels down. He had the heater on full.

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"What's the price of coffee over there?" the old man shouted from the coffin.

"Be quiet," said Koorp. "You'll run out of breath."

"How much?" the old man shouted. "Brazil, Kenya—all blends, I hear! How much?"

"Be quiet," Koorp repeated, and turned on the radio.

"It's a beautiful box," the old man said. "Lined with felt, and such a car! My son," he shouted through the coffin, "and driving such a car!"

Yes, it was a fine car, Koorp thought. A credit to him, this car was. Unlike his father.

"I'll get a hat," the old man called. "One of those sailor's caps with a shining peak, the kind they wear along the coast!"

And you'll hang about, thought Koorp, turning up the radio. You'll hang about the shop and make your common jokes, and tell the Frau Burgermeister how I wet my diapers. You'll drool down the alleys with your low-class ways and boast to the senators about your marvelous escape. And they'll watch you: how you cut your potatoes with a knife, how you belch over your food, how there's not an ounce of dignity or respect to your whole unwashed body. And you'll be there. You'll be there and alive, day and night, until you're a hundred, drinking my drink; there for all of them to point at and say, "That's Koorp Senior—the son runs the shop, you know. Young Koorp." You'll be there to laugh at my speeches and jeer at my indignation, to applaud when the others have stopped, to prod your own chest and say, "My boy! They're clapping for my boy!" And God Almighty, he thought, veering on the road, what will my wife say?

"Have we stopped?" the old man asked.

"I want to look at the documents."

"Turn the radio down. I can't hear!"

"It doesn't matter," Koorp said, and drew from the glove compartment the folder of documents which Christina had carefully assembled. Health certificate, death certificate, export permit, letter of consent, receipt for personal papers. They'd done a thorough job. Good.

He felt fresh now. Acute. He wasn't afraid. He felt fit, ready for orders, as in the war; he wanted to please someone, if only himself. He put the papers back.

"Sandel said you must open the lid."

"It's too dangerous," Koorp said, and turned the radio up still louder.

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"Dietrich, I'm too hot! It's the heater, Dietrich. Turn off the heater!" And then: "Why do you make the music so loud?"

"What music?" Koorp said on an impulse. "I hear no music. What music?" he repeated, putting his face close to the coffin. "You old fool!" he shouted. "You're hearing angels!"

He waited for an answer, but for a long time none came.

"Why don't you open the lid?" the old man asked. His voice had lost its confidence. "Why are we waiting here?"

"I was having a rest," Koorp said. "Before the border."

A man must overcome his past, Koorp thought. He must improve himself, otherwise he's a Communist. He would take a mistress when he got back. There was that girl at the rigging-maker's shop, the plump one. He'd take her. He started the Mercedes.

"Dietrich!"

God, what a car; she ran like a dream. A dream. She really *liked* the weight; she really *liked* the work.

"Dietrich, turn the heater off!"

There was a rest area short of the border. He'd stopped there on the way in, to recover his nerve after the checkpoint. Perhaps he might pull up there, listen to the radio. He turned off the headlights. It was bright now. A good day.

"For Christ's sake, Dietrich!"

He drove in third gear for a while, the heater full on. This cold can be treacherous, he thought, if one isn't used to it. He liked the music. That was the thing about the East: they played damn good music, military music, tunes he remembered. A soldier *was* somebody over here; Koorp would admit that. Even those frontier guards on the way in; there was no getting round them. Boys, of course, lads, but remote. You felt the authority. There was no taking them lightly, not like the *Bundeswehr*. As a matter of fact, he rather admired those boys who'd checked his pass. Politics apart, of course. Here: he'd marched to this one. Tra-lum-da-da.

He slowed down, changed into second, and continued for four kilometers until he came to the rest area. He wouldn't cross over. Not yet. Have a nice rest and a think. It does you good, a rest.

There was no one else about. No traffic. Thirty-one kilometers to the border. There would be the first check as he entered the strip, and the second as he actually came to the border. One thing you could say about those frontier guards. They knew their job. They weren't going to make any mistakes or be fooled, for instance, by a wartime ruse.

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He wiped the sweat from his face. The heater was really going now, with the blower on maximum. He'd take off his coat. His thick, silky coat that Sandel had admired so. Where could he put it, now? Put it so that it didn't crease or spoil or lie on the floor? He spread it carefully over the coffin. Yes, that was the place. He set off again but kept the car in second. The heat was hard to bear. But he needed the heat, of course, on such a cold day, now that he'd taken off his coat to lend to his old father.

Dietrich, indeed! Dieter—that's what his important friends in Lubeck called him—Dieter Koorp, man of substance, grocer of our city, orator of our agony, owner of a Mercedes. A man must shake off his heritage, overcome his past. Dietrich? Who called him Dietrich these days? Who would have the gall to do a thing like that? Somebody a long way off. Somebody the wrong side of the border. Somebody who ought to be dead.

The frontier guards were quite courteous as they checked his papers: health certificate, death certificate, export permit, letter of consent. "We ought to look inside," the young one said.

"Leave him alone," said the corporal. But the young one was a sergeant and he fetched a screwdriver.

"God, the screws are tight," he said.

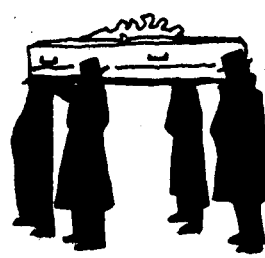
"It's to keep the air out," Koorp explained. "He's four days dead already."

The sergeant touched the old man. "He's still warm," he said.

"It's the heater," Koorp explained. "The Mercedes has a wonderful heater. He's been dead these four days already."

They looked at the papers and then at the body once more. They had authority, those frontier guards, although the sergeant was so young. "You wouldn't have thought he'd look so fresh," the sergeant muttered, "after four full days."

Herr Koorp did not reply. The tears were running down his cheeks again. A man feels for his father.



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An anniversary memoir about EQMM's former editor-in chief, reprinted from a book published by Targ Editions in 1984. The author—your editor—is grateful to everyone mentioned or quoted in the text . . .

WHODUNIT: A BIBLIO-BIO-ANECDOTAL MEMOIR OF FREDERIC DANNAY

by ELEANOR SULLIVAN

"In all reverence I say Heaven bless the Whodunit, the soothing balm on the wound, the cooling hand on the brow, the opiate of the people."—Dorothy Parker

"Any book you haven't read is a new book to you. Each new generation is finding Ellery all over again."—Frederic Dannay

Who-dun-it (hōō dunít) n.[<WHO- DONE + IT: coined in 1930 by D. Gordon in *American News of Books*] [Colloq.] a mystery novel, play, etc.—Copyright © 1982 *Webster's New World Dictionary,* Simon & Schuster.

When Frederic Dannay was twelve, his family moved from Elmira, New York, back to Brooklyn, where he was born. For a time they lived with his grandfather, and there, in his grandfather's house, in the winter of 1917, he first met Sherlock Holmes.

He was in bed with an abscessed ear, "in a cubbyhole of a room . . . with the fingers of winter scratching at the windowpane" when an aunt brought him a book she had borrowed from the library—*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.*

The frontispiece by Sidney Paget—a man in a dress coat and

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striped trousers and a young woman in a wedding gown—was not promising. *A love story,* Fred told himself. But when he turned to the table of contents and saw those titles—*The Red Headed League! The Man with the Twisted Lip! The Adventure of the Speckled Band!*—and started reading the first page of the first story, *A Scandal in Bohemia,* the game was truly afoot.

The next morning he stole out of the house, a wad of yellow-stained cotton still in his ear, and was sitting on the library steps waiting when the librarian came to unlock the door.

In his account of this momentous event in his life, "Who Shall Ever Forget?" Fred tells of how this exacting but gentle-hearted old woman broke all the rules and gave him a library card without his parents' signature and without the usual three days' grace period and told him where he could find books by a man named Doyle. And how back in bed the three precious volumes he had found on the shelves "were food and drink and medicine—and all the Queen's horses and all the Queen's men couldn't put Ellery together again."

"We were cousins," Fred said, "but we were closer than brothers."

Fred was born Daniel Nathan and Manfred B. Lee was born Manford Lepofsky nine months apart in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn—Manny, as he was called, in January 1905 and Danny, as he was called, in October. Their common grandparents, Leopold and Rachael Walerstein, were immigrants from Russia.

Both cousins attended Boys High, Manny going on to attend New York University, Danny leaving high school before earning his diploma in order to help support his family. He started out as a bookkeeper, and later, while attending art school at night, became a copywriter and art director for a New York advertising agency.

In high school, the cousins, who lived only a few blocks apart, had begun to experiment with plot ideas for detective stories. Characterization and other nuances like motivation, Fred said, were of no concern to them yet. Later, when they were in their early twenties and Manfred Lee, who had changed his name, was writing publicity for a movie company, they met for lunch or dinner practically every day. One evening over dinner in an Italian restaurant in Manhattan, they decided to enter a $7,500 detective-novel contest being co-sponsored by Frederick A. Stokes Company and *McClure's Magazine.* Working nights and weekends for six months, they met the December 31, 1928 deadline.

When they learned they had won the contest, they celebrated by

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buying each other a Dunhill pipe—only to learn that *McClure's* was going bankrupt and they would not collect the prize. The Stokes Company, however, took on the novel—*The Roman Hat Mystery*—and its publication in 1929 was to prove a major event in the history of the genre.

The one-book lark Fred Dannay and Manfred Lee had intended *The Roman Hat Mystery* to be was instead the beginning of a great career—or rather two great careers—that did much to shape the history of the detective story. They were the single most powerful writing team in the genre. Their influence has been immense.

The pipes the two men gave each other were monogrammed *EQ*, after the name they had chosen not only as their pseudonym (a requirement of the contest) but also as the name of their detective. A bookseller friend had told them customers were always coming in and asking for a book by Sherlock Holmes, so they decided to give their detective the same name as the author on the theory that it would be easier for the public to remember one name than two.

"What we wanted," Fred told Dick Cavett in a PBS interview years later, "was a name which would have a mnemonic value and remain in the person's memory."

"Mnemonic?" said Cavett. "Mnemonic?"

"Yes." Fred paused. "I think we succeeded, judging from the results."

Ellery had been the name of a boyhood friend in Elmira, a name he had always admired, and the selection of Queen was the result of their trying many names in conjunction with Ellery. "We were so naive in those days," Fred explained, "we didn't realize the name had other connotations."

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That ad, in *The Sunday New York Times* classified section in May 1970, changed my life.

Ten days after submitting my resume, I was called in for an interview with Joel Davis at the Park Avenue South office. The following week I was summoned to Larchmont, New York, for an interview with Frederic Dannay at his home.

By then the Queens had published over a hundred books, including novels, story collections, omnibuses, critical and bibliographic works, and anthologies. Mr. Dannay had served as Editor-in-Chief of the magazine since its inception.

The interview, in the living room of the small comfortable house, lasted several hours. Fred sat in an armchair facing mine, his slippered feet barely touching the floor, his salt-and-pepper beard handsomely trimmed, his shirt, sweater, and trousers crisp but casual—professorial. His easy, direct manner put me immediately at ease. He outlined the history of the magazine and when I confessed my unfamiliarity with it and the mystery field, he told me not to worry about it, the important thing was that I was well acquainted with good fiction—he could teach me all about the mystery in no time.

He described the kinds of stories he looked for and said that he hesitated to call any subject taboo because it was always the exception that proved the rule. I later suggested to him that he hired me because I answered a question of his that day—"How good are you at taking instructions?"—by saying, "I went to parochial school." He refused to say one way or another, but I recall that the answer seemed to please him.

Fourteen years later, I am serving as Fred's successor as editor of *EQMM*, involved with every aspect of it, as was he until his death in September of 1982.

A piece by Anthony Boucher entitled "There Was No Mystery in What the Crime Editor Was After" in the February 26, 1961 *New York Times Book Review* gives the history of *EQMM*'s beginnings. Boucher pointed out that in the 1920s and '30s there had been no magazine market for short stories aimed at the average reader of mystery novels:

"This state of affairs exasperated the young Ellery Queen. In 1933 he was only 28 and already one of America's leading mystery writers—in book form; magazines were all but closed to him. So he founded a magazine called *Mystery League,* the first issue of which

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included a complete novel by his [other] pseudonym, Barnaby Ross. The magazine collapsed after four months, for business and financial reasons having nothing to do with its quality, which was high.

"Queen went on gathering detective short stories, amassing the world's greatest library of short crime fiction (now at Austin in the Library of the University of Texas), and culling from this trove the definitive detective anthology, *101 Years' Entertainment*. Then at last he met an intelligent, imaginative, and solvent magazine publisher—Lawrence E. Spivak—and sold him on the idea of a literate, tasteful, and varied mystery magazine.

"The first issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* appeared in the fall of 1941 . . . It was in digest size, familiar now, but then freakish for a fiction magazine, well printed on good book paper, with a well designed and restrained cover.

"What makes Queen such an unrivaled editor of crime fiction?" continued Boucher. "Well, for one thing, he actually edits, himself, in person—something that is far from common in magazines with illustrious names as part of the title. He prints excellent old stories because he has a trufflehound's nose for finding the one revivable story in an otherwise tedious volume. He prints excellent new stories partly because the very quality of the magazine (and the anthologies derived from it) attracts and stimulates good writers, partly because he is a sensitive and creative editor who is not content to decide whether or not a short story is purchasable as it stands, but will work almost collaboratively with an author—I speak from experience—until a story realizes its full potential."

He was, as an editor, relentless about getting the best from authors. I was astounded by the willingness of writers, many at the top of their profession, given proper direction, to rework their stories, more than once if necessary—and by the improvement that extra work made.

And it was that, to me fearful, thing he did that many authors wrote to me about after he died—the bond that special care he took with their work created between them.

"Part of my neurosis about desperately hunting for the right word, the right phrase, the proper rhythm for each line," Stanley Ellin told me in a recent letter, "was induced by Fred himself when, very early in our acquaintance, he'd get on the phone with me to talk over the story and then say: 'Now I have a few comments which I'd

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like you to consider.' Following which, he'd then go over this word and that phrase which he felt not absolutely right. His own suggestions for repair were usually near-misses themselves, but when we batted things around a while he'd eventually approve some of my own repairs. This, mind you, when I was young and impressionable and unaware I was being traumatized by perfectionism for the rest of my life."

Asked for his reaction to working with Fred, William Targ, then editor at World, replied, "He was a sublime nitpicker."

Judson Philips, a.k.a. Hugh Pentecost, had just graduated from Columbia University but was already publishing fiction in 1932 when Mark Van Doren suggested he come back to hear a brilliant new arrival in the mystery field talk at the Columbia School of Journalism.

This was to be the famous masked lecture.

"People still thought Ellery Queen was one man," Jud said. "In later years, when I knew Fred and Manny, I asked them which one had spoken that night, but neither one would ever tell me. To this day I don't know."

In his engrossing book about Ellery Queen, *Royal Bloodline,* Francis M. Nevins, Jr., says the cousins flipped a coin to see who would do the honors, that Mr. Lee lost and so he was the one who gave the lecture. But in the Fall 1982 *Paperback Quarterly,* Angela Andrews, writing about Ellery Queen, has "a masked Frederic Dannay duly appearing as Ellery Queen" at the Columbia School of Journalism lecture.

In the audience at the lecture, at any rate, was Colston Leigh, the lecture agent, who immediately signed Ellery Queen for speaking tours—which were to last two years. The cousins, wearing masks, took turns playing Ellery and Barnaby Ross (their pseudonym for a second series of detective novels they had started). Rumors circulated that Queen was another pseudonym of S. S. Van Dine and that Ross was the pen name of Alexander Woollcott. Though they gave more than a hundred lectures, it was years before Colston Leigh found out that both men were Ellery Queen.

It has been said that their publisher, Frederick Stokes, gave away their true identity at a cocktail party to celebrate the publication of *The Devil To Pay* in 1938, but Queen and Ross had actually "come

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out of the closet" over a year earlier, in a brief announcement in the October 10, 1936 *Publishers Weekly*.

But the mysteries continued. Pocket Books, Inc., entered into the spirit by publishing the following statement in their paperback edition of *The Spanish Cape Mystery* (1942) in answer to letters from readers inquiring into the identity of "J. J. McC.," who wrote the forewords to the early Ellery Queen novels:

"In the course of the five years or so during which we have had the pleasure of publishing Mr. Queen's novels, hundreds of inquiries have been addressed to us, demanding an explanation both for the mystery surrounding and the identity of the gentleman who has invariably written the forewords to the Queen books. We regret that we cannot satisfy our correspondents. We do not know."

That resolve to remain mysterious stayed with Fred through his lifetime. To Marlene Cimons, a *Los Angeles Times* feature writer who asked him in 1979 (the golden anniversary of *The Roman Hat Mystery*) how the two men had actually worked, he said he would rather not go into it.

"You should allow somebody some mysteries, even after fifty years," he said.

Fred's style in editing *EQMM* could be considered eccentric, but I soon became used to it because there was his special logic behind everything he did. I didn't know he was exasperated by my non-use of the terminal comma (that is, a comma between the second-to-last word in a series of words and the "and") until one day when we were discussing some copy I'd sent him, he sighed dramatically and said, "I wish you could learn to use the terminal comma." I've been scrupulous about using it ever since.

I couldn't convince *him* to go along with Ted Bernstein's Doom of Whom campaign, however, even when I quoted Archie Goodwin (in Rex Stout's *A Family Affair*) as saying (after Nero Wolfe had asked him, "Whom did you hear say that?"): "I have tried to talk him out of that 'whom.' Only highbrows and grandstanders and schoolteachers say 'whom,' and he knows it. It's the mule in him." Perhaps it was the mule in Fred, too, but he simply wouldn't accept any copy I wrote that substituted who for whom.

There was only one time I recall wanting to query his editing but I didn't quite have the nerve. That was when he changed a reference to a woman who was "a pushover" to "Miss Roundheels." It was an example of his tendency to be conservative and old-fashioned about

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minor things—a tendency that didn't extend to the larger work. There he was always innovative and open to any new trend as long as it was in good taste. And he did edit with great care in regard to what he perceived the writer's original intention to be. "It's the author's story," he reminded us time and time again.

His voice, except when he was upset and it rose in pitch, was pleasant—and in either case expressive. (He himself must have been sensitive to voices. He was, he once told me, in awe of men with big, resonant voices—he cited those of John Dickson Carr and John Ball.) The minute he picked up the phone, I could tell his mood. Most of the time his "Yes, Eleanor" was energetic, enthusiastic, ready for work or news. Sometimes it was slightly impatient (he had a visitor, perhaps, or was watching the World Series—he loved baseball—or was engrossed in some reading). Then there were the times he was overly patient (he wasn't feeling well). When his spirits were high and work was going well, he would talk at length on any subject and even prolong the conversation to ask about my personal life or if there was anything new around the office.

In the course of his calls I often found myself interrupting him and apologizing, and every time—every time—he said, "No, go ahead." He was a man of courtesy—and curiosity. But it was his directness and his sense of humor, which always came out of left field, that more than anything else defined his personality for me. When I speak of his directness I mean the way, for example, he answered me when I asked if he ever got tired of reading manuscripts.

"Yes," he said. Not "Of course." Not "Are you kidding?" Not "Why? Are you?" Just that quiet, unstressed, honest "Yes."

As for his humor, he once asked me what I thought of a woman he knew that I had just met. I said she'd struck me as kind of dizzy. He laughed and said, "That's part of her charm."

Remarks he made keep coming back. How he felt the best climate for the mystery short story would be a dozen mystery magazines, all healthy and competing, "rather than the near monopoly that exists now." How he believed slow starters have it all over fast starters. How being a professional and being paid for what you do has its price—you've got to be willing to take the heaviest, and often unfairest, kind of criticism. That in print, like almost any canvas in a frame, any story looks better.

I remember overhearing a writer at a conference complaining to

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Fred because he had rejected her last few submissions. "Be patient with us," Fred told her gently.

From the beginning, but especially in the last four or five years of his life, he would suggest I be more assertive with him about what I thought we should or should not publish, that he wanted me to start putting my own stamp on the magazine. "Consider the future," he said once. Then: "You know what I'm saying, don't you?" All I could manage was the one word: "Yes."

In her January 1959 *Esquire* column, "Dorothy Parker on Books," the terror of the Algonquin Roundtable and a fan of the Queens wrote, "Murder is my true love, murder is my darling; if not all the world to me, it is at least an appreciable chunk. That does not mean, I promise you, that I go about parched and panting for a draught of fresh blood, or that I ever took any personal part in a killing. Oh, naturally, I have flirted with plans for doing murder most foul, but no more obsessively and no more frequently than has anybody else—no more than four or five times a week, say, while reading the morning papers.

"The closest I can come to the adored subject is in reading tales of it. To be at their best, for me, they should be true."

But some paragraphs later, in a section that leads in with *Gentlemen, the Queens,* she went on to say: "Though you may not have accounts of factual crimes every day, life can still be sweet. For fictional murders valiantly hold their own, from the stunning works of the mighty Dashiell Hammett, on down, down, down. And long before you get into the down, down, downs—tall among the very highest-ups, in fact—are the stories of Ellery Queen, an author somewhat difficult to explain. Ellery Queen is two men. Or perhaps it is better to say that two men are Ellery Queen—no, that doesn't look right, either. Well, anyway, it seems there are two gentlemen named Frederic Dannay and Manfred Lee, who banded together to write as one, signing their products as Ellery Queen. Then, possibly to make shorter the way on which lies madness, they named their crack brainchild, the hero of their many tales, Ellery Queen, too. So there, if you can clear your head, you are.

"Ellery Queen, the hero, is not a detective so much as a detector; that is, he comes in when everything is thoroughly balled up and straightens it out, just for the love of justice. He is, I think, the most attractive of current investigators; though he must watch a nasty

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little habit of quoting from the classics and dropping into foreign tongues . . .

"He is slightly built and a wearer, perpetually, of pince-nez, but quick and lethal with his fists, especially if he feels that something impolite has been said to his father, Inspector Queen of the New York Police Force. Women sigh and swoon for the young man, but he has yet to respond. His heart, so far as I can gather, belongs to Daddy.

"Not the least interesting passages in the Ellery Queen books are those that show glimpses of the home life of father and son, who live in a brownstone on the Upper West Side, are served by a treasure of a sixteen-year-old houseboy named Djuna, and drink great pitchers of lemonade on hot nights. The reader would like to see more of this menage, perhaps, but, despite its fascination, it would hold up the rush of the story. And the rush of the story is, almost unfailingly, magnificent.

"The latest Queen book is, actually, three books bound into one under the title of *The New York Murders*. (Ellery Queen deals entirely in murders; you are not fobbed off, as you are with Mr. Leslie Charteris's Saint, with pablum about the rape of the dowager's emeralds or the theft of the blueprint of the newest submarine.) These three murder novels seem to me the best of the Queen stories, which, on the word of one who has watched closely for years, is serious praise. They have speed, ingenuity, and really brilliant examples of detection, and the ending consists more often of a double surprise than a single one.

"The joint authors also toss off prize contests, gather anthologies, and get out a monthly magazine containing their own stories and those of other writers. That it appears only monthly is too seldom for me."

Fred believed the hard-boiled private eye to be just as stylistically worked out as the classic detective was—"rather eccentric and omniscient." The big difference, he said, was that the hard-boiled authors were trying to create an *illusion* of realism whereas the classic-detective writers were trying to do the opposite. "If you had the turn of mind that went one way," he said, "creating the illusion of realism, you would write a hard-boiled detective story, but if you had the turn of mind Mr. Lee and I had, of using illusion as the reality, you would write the classic detective story . . ."

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Of the character Ellery Queen, Manny Lee said, "He may have started out as a jerk and a snob, but he changed completely."

Halfway House was the first big change in him, in Fred's opinion. "He began to show heart as well as mind . . . He changed because Manny and I were getting older, having more mature thoughts and putting them into the character. He changed drastically. His attitude toward his father changed. At first he was very patronizing. At the end, they had developed a warm father-son relationship. He had a social conscience. When we started, whom did we know but ourselves, and we didn't know ourselves that well."

At first they worked in the same room, sometimes at the same typewriter and the same desk, sometimes at different desks. There were times later on when they worked 3,000 miles apart, one in California and one in New York. The New York office they kept for years, more as a mailing address than a workplace, had a small bulletproof window, left behind by a former tenant—a jeweler.

In the early books they had Ellery air every possibility, giving the reader all the facts and analyzing every aspect of the crime until only one solution remained.

Remarking later on the Challenge to the Reader device they used then, Fred said: "I have mixed feelings about it I've never been able to resolve. It might be that certain readers would resent it. But others might be fascinated with the idea that they could solve the mystery at that point, and if they didn't solve it they would get all the more satisfaction out of learning the truth."

Which Queen Challenge to the Reader novel is the best, Julian Symons conceded, must be largely a matter of individual taste. "My own favorite," he added, "is *The Greek Coffin Mystery,* with its brilliant surprise ending, but almost equally good are *The Dutch Shoe Mystery,* which has a perfect piece of extended reasoning about the shoes left by the murderer, *The French Powder Mystery,* in which you have to wait until the last line for the solution, and *The Chinese Orange Mystery,* with its turned-round clues. Judged as exercises in rational deduction, these are certainly among the best detective stories ever written."

(The best of the Queen short stories, Symons thinks, "belong to the early ratiocinative period, and both *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* and *The New Adventures* are as absolutely fair and totally puzzling as the most passionate devotee of orthodoxy could

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wish . . . every story in these books is composed with wonderful skill.")

In *Royal Bloodline,* Francis M. Nevins, Jr., noted: "Perhaps the most striking thing about the Queen activities during the late 1930s is their staggering diversity. In addition to a novel a year, an occasional short story, scholarly and bibliophilic work, three screenwriting stints in Hollywood, and an unfortunate attempt at a play [*Danger, Men Working* was co-authored by Queen and Lowell Brentano and closed after a few nights in Baltimore and Philadelphia], Dannay and Lee somehow found time to branch out into a new medium that was about to enter its golden age: dramatic radio."

The cousins' radio work consisted of some early uncredited scripts for programs like *Alias Jimmy Valentine* and *The Shadow,* nine years of *The Adventures of Ellery Queen,* and a half-hour panel show Fred considered one of the most fascinating experiments in radio history. For about six months in 1939, Ogden Nash and later S. J. Perelman moderated the show created by Fred and Manny, *Author! Author!* In it, a dramatization was presented in which a character was given a crucial choice and made one that was unnatural, to say the least. The panel, consisting of Dannay, Lee, and two guests (Mark Van Doren, Dorothy Parker, Moss Hart, and George S. Kaufman among others), was challenged to give plausible reasons for the choice. It was obvious that by doing the unpredictable, the character in the drama stood to gain something even more important to him or her. The question was, what could be even more beneficial to that character than the outwardly more valuable choice he or she had rejected?

One of the two major reasons for a hiatus in the Queen output between the end of 1939 and 1942 (the other being the car crash in which Fred nearly lost his life) was the fact that the cousins had to abandon a novel-in-progress when they discovered that Agatha Christie in *And Then There Were None,* which was being serialized in the *Saturday Evening Post,* had anticipated their plot.

Israel Shenker quoted Manfred Lee in *The New York Times,* 2/22/69, as saying, "Fred and I never agreed on anything. He's a very clever, driving kind of individual and a perfectionist. I'm a perfectionist, too, but I tend to be more of an extrovert."

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In the April 21, 1970 *Look,* Fred was quoted: "The odds are, if we were not related by blood, we would have separated long ago."

Much later, he told Dick Cavett that their collaboration was rewarding and great fun:

"But there is a great dependency problem between two collaborators who work together for a long time. If two people work together on a single book, the problem of dependency doesn't even arise. But when you've worked not years but decades together—forty-three years in our case—the question of dependency becomes a great psychological handicap. Very early, I was beginning to ask myself the question constantly: can I write a novel alone?

"Then certain circumstances in my life—mostly the result of a tragedy [the death of his third son, Stephen, at the age of six]—forced me to take six months off from Ellery Queen work, and in those six months I decided to write a book about my boyhood. A novel. This was a therapeutic thing and a substitute for the psychiatrist's couch. I wrote this novel, which was called *The Golden Summer,* and when it was written and published, the dependency hangup vanished and I've never given it another thought. You have to prove to yourself at least once that you can do it. Whether you have to keep on proving it to yourself depends on your personality."

Three excerpts from *The Golden Summer,* under the umbrella title *The Adventures of Danny,* ran in the June, August, and October 1956 issues of *EQMM* with introductions, respectively, by Anthony Boucher, James Yaffe, and Stanley Ellin.

The first of the three was "The Boy and the Book," which, of all the Danny episodes, Boucher found the most appealing. "Like the rest of the volume," he wrote, "it calls up vividly the sights and scents and tastes of the past; as always, Danny is at once ingenuous and ingenious, and pretty devastating in either manner."

James Yaffe, introducing "The Boy and the Money Box," pointed out, "The author makes Danny much more than the stock all-American boy of the Penrod-imitators. Without glossing over a thing, he shows weaknesses in Danny's character—his cowardliness, his insecurity, his over-cleverness, his early obsession with money as a means of compensating for his thick glasses and his short stature."

And in presenting "The Boy and the Law," Stanley Ellin commented that "It does not make one of your hackneyed cute stories about boyhood—young Danny was not the traditional barefoot lad engaged in the rose-colored, adult conception of youthful escapades. He was scrawny and bespectacled. He was full of vague fears and

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alarms, and had a streak of avarice long and wide enough for any full grown adult. Yet he was also sensitive, imaginative, full of loves and loyalties, and, above all, an intuitive master of the fine art of improvisation. He was, in brief, Danny Nathan, and out of him emerged a writer who today can hark back and relive the past so vividly that we, too, are able to live it with him."

Fred wrote an Introduction for the special Golden Anniversary Edition of *The Roman Hat Mystery* published by Otto Penzler's The Mysterious Press in 1979. At Carol Brener's Murder Ink party celebrating the fiftieth birthday of Ellery Queen at New York's Lotos Club on January 26th, Penzler arranged to have specially bound copies of the Introduction distributed to the guests. In it, Fred expounded on his childhood reading, which had consisted not only of Sherlock Holmes but of Horatio Alger, Peck's Bad Boy, Tom Swift, the Andrew Lang fairy books, Frank Merriwell, Baseball Joe, the Rover Boys, J. Fenimore Cooper ("with difficulty"), Tarzan ("with no difficulty at all"), Jules Verne, The Three Musketeers, and the Oz stories. He "admired and envied" Maurice Leblanc's Arsene Lupin even more than he idolized Holmes. "He was everything I wasn't and couldn't be, everything I wanted and hoped to be. He was the 'cool' man, whereas Holmes, by comparison, was the 'cold' man, and Lupin's appeal to my emotions was, I confess, even stronger, more compelling, than Holmes's appeal to my intellect."

Speaking as Guest of Honor at the Murder Ink party, Fred expressed and showed his sadness that Manfred Lee was not with him. He died in an ambulance on the way to Connecticut's Waterbury Hospital on April 2, 1971, after suffering a heart attack. He had lived in Roxbury, Connecticut, on a 63-acre estate he declared a game preserve, with his wife Kaye (a former actress who had appeared in some of the Queen radio adventures) and their eight children. He once won an election to the town library from neighbor Arthur Miller and served as justice of the peace in 1957–58.

"Mr. Lee was a very earthy man," Fred once reflected. "He liked the outdoors and animals. I don't care for animals and I'm not an outdoors man." He quoted Francis M. Nevins, Jr., saying he couldn't imagine Fred bending over and picking up dirt any more than he could imagine Mr. Lee writing a poem. (Fred loved poetry and wrote a good deal of it—with no commercial success. One reason given him was that it was too personal . . .)

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After Dilys Winn, its first proprietor, opened the Murder Ink bookstore on West 87th Street in 1972, customers would say, "Did you know in *The French Powder Mystery* it mentions that Ellery Queen lived on this street?" Well, of course she knew it, she said in her best-selling *Murder Ink,* "I'd planned it."

She went on:

"Fittingly, the first letter the store ever received was from Fred Dannay . . . He wished the store well and asked to be kept posted on how it was doing . . . For months I wrote thank-you notes to him in my head. That's as far as I got . . . I am not a particularly humble person. I do not speak softly, nor do I fear to tread almost anywhere. But Ellery Queen—that was different. To me, he was more than a mystery writer; he was The Mystery Story."

Five years later, Dilys finally did write him a letter and Fred invited her to Larchmont to tea—which stretched into a six-hour visit that included dinner. One of the many things they talked about was why there had been no Queen novel since 1971. Fred told her that a writer has to know when to stop—and also suggested that he might ultimately be better known for the magazine than for his coauthorship of Ellery Queen.

In *Murder Ink* Dilys wrote: "He suffers, I think, from rampant humility. Let me be immodest for him: The man who thinks his work as a writer will eventually be eclipsed is the man who has won five Edgar awards and has sold more than one hundred and fifty million books worldwide. The conclusion is obvious: Never ask an author to judge his own work."

"He said," Dilys added, "he didn't think [as many *EQMM* authors claimed] he was an incorrigible title changer and I was on the verge of believing him until not five minutes later he asked, 'About this title of yours, *Murder Ink* . . . ' "

Fred was, admittedly, a television addict, totally indiscriminating, he said, about what he watched. But he cared how Ellery and Richard Queen were portrayed on television and surprised himself by liking the 1975–1976 TV version of *Ellery Queen* very much.

Previewing the weekly show in the 7/23/75 *New York Daily News,* Kay Gardella reported that Jim Hutton, playing Ellery, would not be like any of his forerunners (on TV these were George Nader, Lee Phillips, Lee Bowman, and Peter Lawford; on radio Donald Chase; in films Donald Cook, Eddie Quillan, Ralph Bellamy, and William

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Gargan): "While he will still have the same brilliant mind and power of deductive reasoning, Hutton is pleased, at least, that he will be lighter, a little nuttier, and much more fallible."

Fred was home alone when the first episode was telecast. I remember he spoke of it with enthusiasm the next day, and four years later he told an interviewer for *Playboy:* "When I saw him on the screen, I had the most curious reaction. I had the feeling I was seeing myself years and years ago. After a while I got used to the idea and found it very amusing."

In the March 1977 *American Way,* Sheila Sobell Moramarco quoted Fred as saying that when he saw that two seasons of lecture tours didn't cure his dread of public speaking, he threw up his hands and decided there was no need for him to be a public figure. Later in the year, in a newspaper article about the five-day conference that was called to set up the University of California's Mystery Library, John Foreman wrote: "Despite a professional dread of public speaking and so-so health, Frederic Dannay shared vigorously in the week's concentrated program of discussions and analyses of the mystery story, and alone received standing ovations."

Otto Penzler tells of an exchange between Fred and a television reporter that week.

With just the hint of a sneer, the reporter told Fred he didn't read detective stories. "Oh?" said Fred. "And do you read at all?" "Well, no," admitted the reporter. "Then they certainly sent the right man for this job, didn't they?" Fred commented.

On April 17, 1979, Fred was awarded a degree as Doctor of Humane Letters at Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin, a project conceived and carried through by writer John Ball.

Among those attending were Robert L. Fish. Writing about it later in the 1980 *Mystery Writers Annual,* Bob said, "The weather we enjoyed in Waukesha was perfect after months and months of what the natives assured us was enough snow, sleet, rain, and dark of night to satisfy the most demanding of postmen. The Waukeshavians attribute this phenomenon to the arrival of spring, but I am convinced it came from the full glow of Frederic Dannay's warm smile when they flipped the orange sash over his head and moved the tassel of his mortar to the left. On the basis of that glow, they should have good weather in Waukesha for a long time to come . . ."

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When he returned home from the Third International Congress of Crime Writers in Sweden in 1981, Fred was exhausted but exhilarated. As on his earlier trips with his third wife, Rose, to Italy, Israel, California, Wisconsin, and Japan (twice), he had been lionized by publishers, fans, and fellow writers in grand style. He said he was sure it was his "last hurrah."

Fred told Dick Cavett: "If I had my life to live over again, which is a beautiful thought, my first choice would be to be a psychiatrist. If I couldn't be a psychiatrist, I think I would prefer to be an artist, which was actually my first ambition in life. I studied at the Art Students League and I even earned my living for a while as an art director. But I realized early that there was a tremendous gap between a first-rate artist and a second-rate artist, and I knew I couldn't be a first-rate artist and I didn't think I'd be happy being a second-rate artist, so I opted for something else."

At his funeral, Rose, his sons Richard and Douglas, and others closest to him added a spadeful of earth into the grave. Stanley Ellin, standing near the graveside, looked around at those in attendance. "He changed the lives of everyone here," he said.

I'm sure Fred would have been astounded by the condolences that poured into the office from readers. That so many *EQMM* authors, old and new, wrote would probably have surprised him less, but that they wrote as they did would have moved him deeply.

"Losing Fred is like losing an integral part of my own personality," Peter Godfrey wrote from England. "My mentor, my friend, has gone; I will never forget him."

Julian Symons wrote: "I have never known anybody more courteous and kind, both in business and personal dealings, and this although the Atlantic was between us and we couldn't be close friends. There will be many who miss him in England."

"You will have a thousand letters so I won't trouble with more than a word of love and concern," wrote Christianna Brand. "He was a great figure in the crime-writing world, the greatest, I suppose, and the old books were the greatest, too."

Davis Publications was founded in August 1957 with the purchase of *EQMM* from Mercury Press by B. G. Davis (formerly of Ziff-Davis), whose son Joel is now president of the company.

Reminiscing recently about Fred's dedication to the magazine,

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Joel spoke of how his meticulous skills were invariably put to use in every part of *EQMM*'s operation, up to and including the covers and the direct-mail efforts the circulation department utilizes from time to time to encourage new subscribers and attract a higher percentage of renewals: "Regardless of the source we went to for copywriting—and over the years we went to a great many firms and individuals, each of which charged an obscene amount of money—Fred couldn't help but pick these efforts apart, and as often as not he rewrote the whole thing.

"He was a most caring person," Joel said. "He was an invaluable resource in discussing business problems—and, for that matter, personal problems. I'll never forget his lengthy conversations with me after my father's death in 1972. His real concern was for my mother, whose loneliness he could understand from his own after the death of his first two wives. That unique insight was extremely helpful to me in attempting to revive my mother's spirits."

Fred was one of the founders of the Mystery Writers of America and served numerous times as a board member. He was troubled by his dual roles of writer and editor, and when he presented a concern to the board it was always with deference to the judgment of his colleagues. After his death, the board voted that a special award should be established in Ellery Queen's name. It was agreed that the Ellery Queen Award would be presented, whenever the awards chairman thought it was warranted, to individuals excelling in one or more of the areas in which Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee contributed so significantly as Ellery Queen. The first Ellery Queen Award, presented by Rose Dannay at the annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner in 1983, went to Mary Jane Latsis and Martha Henissart, who up to that time had collaborated on nineteen highly entertaining and erudite detective novels under the pseudonym Emma Lathen, as well as five others under the pseudonym R. B. Dominic.

The Ellery Queen books have sold in various editions published by some 100 publishers all over the world more than 150 million copies and have been translated into every major language except Chinese.

EQMM, called by *The Readers Encyclopedia of American Literature* "the finest periodical of its kind," is now published thirteen times a year with an average circulation of 400,000. It is distributed

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in the U.S., Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, with foreign editions in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Japan.

Collectors of rare books have been attracted to the Ellery Queen first editions for many years. Inscribed copies of certain of their books, in particular *The Roman Hat Mystery, The Golden Summer, Calamity Town, Queen's Quorum, The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes, The Chinese Orange Mystery,* and others, fetch surprising premiums. Specialists in crime fiction put the Queen titles very high on their lists of "desirables," especially when in fine condition with the jackets intact. The fictional character, Ellery Queen, was a bibliophile and Frederic Dannay himself was a lifelong collector of rare books. He built two distinguished libraries, including a superb collection of poetry.

Many distinguished writers besides those quoted earlier have written in praise of Ellery Queen, including Agatha Christie, Lin Yutang, James M. Cain, James Hilton, Lord Dunsany, Georges Simenon, Michael Innes, Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham, Mignon G. Eberhart, Rex Stout, Erle Stanley Gardner, Vincent Starrett, Christopher Morley (with his witty "E.Q. has I.Q."), and Isaac Asimov, who in *Banquets of the Black Widowers,* his fourth collection of short stories in the series that originated in *EQMM,* refers to Fred Dannay as "the man who probably did more for the mystery field than any other single person since Conan Doyle."

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Roy Vickers, *The Department of Dead Ends*, 1947
Dashiell Hammett: *Nightmare Town*, 1948
O. Henry: *Cops and Robbers*, 1948
Dashiell Hammett: *The Creeping Siamese*, 1950
Stuart Palmer: *The Monkey Murder and Other Stories*, 1950
Dashiell Hammett: *Woman in the Dark*, 1952
Dashiell Hammett: *A Man Named Thin and Other Stories*, 1962
Erle Stanley Gardner: *The Case of the Murderer's Bride and Other Stories*, 1969
Lawrence Treat: *P As in Police*, 1970
Edward D. Hoch: *The Spy and the Thief*, 1971

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Michael Gilbert: *Amateur in Violence*, 1973
Stanley Ellin: *Kindly Dig Your Grave and Other Wicked Stories*, 1975
Julian Symons: *How To Trap a Crook and 12 Other Mysteries*, 1977

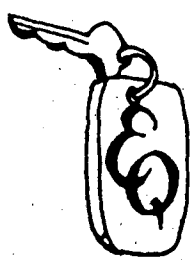
Critical and Bibliographic Books (as Ellery Queen)

The Detective Short Story, 1942
Queen's Quorum, 1951
The Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library of Detective-Crime Mystery Fiction (with Howard Haycraft), 1951
In the Queen's Parlor, 1957

Magazines (edited by Ellery Queen)

Mystery League, 1933–34
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 1941–

Editor's Note: Targ Editions are published by William Targ at 101 West 12th Street, New York, NY 10011. Of the 25 limited editions Mr. Targ has published since 1979, seven are by authors published in EQMM: Ray Bradbury, Chester Himes, Isaac Asimov, D. R. Bensen, and others. To give you an idea of the scope of the publications, among the most recent titles are *Vivaldi's Four Seasons* by W. D. Snodgrass, *Our Late Night* by Wallace Shawn (with an Introduction by John Lahr), *The Last Night* by Norman Mailer, *Spirits of the Valley* by M. F. K. Fisher, and *Abacus Now: Footnotes to Indecent Pleasures & Observations on Fine Book Printing, Book-Collecting & Other Personal Matters* by Mr. Targ himself.



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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

A common daydream of mystery readers goes like this: What would happen if two famous continuing characters were to join forces and appear in the same adventure? What if Philo Vance and Sam Spade became competing sleuths on a Jazz Age nightclub murder? Or if Sherlock Holmes raced Father Brown to the solution of a bizarre impossible crime in an English country house? Or if James Bond and Matt Helm crossed paths in a world-hanging-by-a-thread espionage plot? Or if Spenser collaborated with Kinsey Millhone, or Adam Dalgliesh with Charles Paris?

True, some writers of more than one series have brought their own separate sleuths together on occasion to share the stage—Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee in Tony Hillerman's last several novels, for example, or H. C. Bailey's Reggie Fortune and Joshua Clunk in the 1939 novel *The Great Game,* or Edward D. Hoch's Ben Snow and Sam Hawthorne in "The Problem of the Haunted Tepee" (*EQMM,* December 1990)—but that, delightful as it may be, is not much of a trick, requiring only one creator's whim. And it doesn't really count if the creator of *one* of the famous characters brings in another's character for his own purposes, as Maurice Leblanc did when he put Arsene Lupin at odds with Sherlock Holmes (a.k.a. Herlock Sholmes and Holmlock Shears) in the novel first published in the United States as *The Blonde Lady* (1910).

Robert J. Randisi does both of the above, regularly bringing his own private eyes into each other's cases and also having them consult everybody else's private eyes when out-of-town help is needed.

But such a fictional collaboration can only be considered completely authentic when both authors are involved, and it isn't too surprising it happens seldom. Not all writers are amenable to collaboration, and any creator of a famous detective would want to be certain the other writer's sleuth didn't seem smarter, have more dialogue, or otherwise upstage the home team. And writers' styles and approaches differ. Imagine Dashiell Hammett and S. S. Van Dine successfully collaborating—or even agreeing to give it a try. It may or may not be apocryphal that a projected collaboration of Erle Stanley Gardner and Rex Stout, in which Perry Mason and Nero Wolfe would meet, fell apart over the question of whether Archie Goodwin would be permitted to take Della Street to Atlantic City for the weekend.

Despite all the barriers, there have been occasional official collaborations of different writers' series detectives. Richard S. Prather's Shell Scott and Stephen Marlowe's Chester Drum shared an adven-

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ture in *Double in Trouble* (1959). Bill Pronzini's "Nameless' private eye has twice collaborated, with Collin Wilcox's Frank Hastings in *Twospot* (1979) and with Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone in *Double* (1984). Pronzini and Muller manage the even more difficult trick of combining sleuths who occupy different centuries, John Quincannon and Elena Oliverez, in *Beyond the Grave* (1986).

The first team of writers to bring their detectives together in the same story were Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice, whose respective sleuths, schoolteacher Hildegrade Withers and lawyer John J. Malone, first joined forces in "Once Upon a Train" (*EQMM*, October 1950). Several more joint appearances followed, some solo jobs by Palmer following the death of Rice, and the stories were gathered between covers, with an Introduction by EQ, in *People versus Withers and Malone* (1963). The collection, showing the two authors and their sleuths could be as delightful together as separately, has been newly reprinted in a trade paperback edition by International Polygonics (Madison Square, P.O. Box 1563, New York, NY 10159-1563) at $7.95. The same firm also offers a new edition of Palmer's *The Penguin Pool Murder* ($7.95), the memorable 1931 debut of Miss Withers, with an Introduction by William Ruehlmann.

*** Aaron Elkins: *Icy Clutches*, Mysterious, $16.95. Forensic anthropologist Gideon Oliver returns for a sixth adventure, set at Alaska's Glacier Bay, where the relatives of members of a geological party killed in a 1960 avalanche are called together to hear the most celebrated survivor, TV personality M. Audley Tremaine, read his colorful account of the incident. The subsequent murder plot embodies the humor, characterization, and sound puzzle plotting expected from the reliable Elkins. (For the statistically minded: count up the number of eating and drinking references in the novel. Almost as many, I'd guess, as the mystery fiction references in one of Carolyn G. Hart's novels.)

*** George Baxt: *The Talking Pictures Murder Case*, St. Martin's, $15.95. The transition from silent to talking pictures in late-Twenties Hollywood proves a surefire background for this specialist in mystery based on show-biz history. Scores of real movie personalities (from Norma Shearer and Mary Pickford to Ramon Novarro and Hedda Hopper) share the stage with fictional characters whose real-life counterparts are easily identifiable—notably the Diamond Films mainstays Annamary Darling, swashbuckling husband Willis Loring, drug-addicted brother Jack, and formidable mother Marie—and movie-wise L.A. cop Herbert Villon. This is an entertaining job, with a good realization of the period and the desperate atmosphere of an industry in turmoil. Be warned though that Baxt will resort to anything, including some irritating anachronisms, for a pun.

*** Marian Babson: *Encore Murder*, St. Martin's, $15.95. Movie-

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making in days gone by also figures in this light and enjoyable contemporary mystery, the second to feature former movie stars Trixie Dolan and Evangeline Sinclair, Americans in London hoping to star in a revival of *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Their fellow actress, the poisonous Griselda von Kirstenberg is planning to write her memoirs, and Evangeline has a shot at the title role in a feminist film version of Shakespeare called *Queen Leah*.

*** James R. McCahery: *Grave Undertaking*, Knightsbridge, 255 East 49th Street, New York, NY 10017; $4.95. The author joins that small but distinguished group of writers (Crider, Randisi, Nevins, among others) who were well known as fans before becoming mystery writing pros. Lavina London, former radio actress, looks into some murders with a detailed and intriguing background of the funeral business in her first recorded case, a well written and soundly constructed debut, if a little overlong, particularly in the explanations that follow the revelation of the killer's identity. The publishers are directing this to fans of *Murder, She Wrote*, who should enjoy it. It's a genuine classical detective novel, certainly much better than the ersatz Jessica Fletcher hardcover of a few months back.

** Taylor McCafferty: *Pet Peeves*, Pocket, $3.50. Haskell Blevins of Pigeon Fork, Kentucky, laments, "It's tough being a hard-boiled detective in a small town." In his first case, he is asked to find the killer of Grammy Turley, whose cat and bird were also victims. Is there a serial killer of housepets on the loose? Though it may be a little too laid back for some tastes, at its best, the novel has the same kind of gentle, low-key appeal as Bill Crider's novels and Andy Griffith's old TV show.

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a *NEW* combination story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

In the December 1990 issue, Edward D. Hoch's "The Problem of the Haunted Tepee" featured two of his series characters, Dr. Sam Hawthorne and Ben Snow, in tandem. Here he repeats that refreshing twist with two more of his series characters our constant readers have come to know so well.

"Just what is your occupation, Mr. Velvet?" Captain Leopold asked.

"I'm a free-lance consultant," Nick told him . . .

THE THEFT OF LEOPOLD'S BADGE

by EDWARD D. HOCH

On what was to be the most exciting and memorable day of her young life, Rita Mulroney arrived early at the Parker Museum of Fine Art. She'd been up before dawn in the hotel room she was sharing with Christina Black, checking her costume and reviewing the plan for the day's events. She'd moved heaven and earth with the casting director in Manhattan to win a spot as one of the nine Muses in the day-long pageant, and she wasn't going to miss her big opportunity.

It was, in reality, an elaborate fund-raising activity for the benefit of the museum, beginning with "Breakfast with the Muses" at eight A.M. This was designed mainly to attract the community's business and financial leaders, who would be entertained by dancing girls while they started the day with eggs Benedict and hopefully pledged a generous sum for the museum's expansion. This would be followed by luncheon and dinner performances by the Muses for other com-

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munity and social leaders, all in the museum's Grand Atrium, surrounded by ten centuries of art treasures.

The nine Muses, mostly modern-dance students recruited in New York, had been in town for two nights and had held a dress rehearsal at the museum the previous evening, running through the simple dance numbers they would be performing during each of the meals. Rita Mulroney had been cast as Erato, the Muse of erotic poetry.

Leaving the hotel room at six-thirty, she shook Christina awake and told her the time, then she hurried downstairs and found a taxi. She was at the back door of the museum before seven, and it was the director himself, Samuel Pearlman, who admitted her. He recognized her from the previous night's rehearsal. "It's Rita, isn't it? You're early. Too bad about this rain but I think it's stopped." Pearlman was a balding, paunchy man in his early fifties who looked more like an old-style banker than the director of an art museum. He smiled at her a bit mechanically and directed her down the basement hall to the makeshift dressing room by the employees' lockers.

Rita's costume, which she carried in a tubular tote bag, consisted of a flesh-colored body stocking and a togalike garment whose color provided the dancers with their only individuality. Hers was saffron. Her hotel roommate Christina would be wearing pale blue. Rita unzipped her bag and quickly shed her street clothes. She'd just gotten into her body stocking when the dressing-room door opened to admit another woman. She was older than Rita, perhaps in her mid-thirties, with platinum-blonde hair framing a pale face.

"Hello there," the woman said by way of greeting. "Are you one of the Muses?"

"That's right." She was about Rita's size, with good legs, Rita noticed, slipping into her saffron-colored toga. "Rita Mulroney."

The woman smiled pleasantly. "Me, too."

"You're a Muse? I didn't see you at rehearsal last night."

"I'm filling in for one of the girls who's sick. My name is Sandra Paris." She started unbuttoning her dark-blue raincoat.

Rita wasn't quite convinced. "Where's your costume?"

"You're wearing it," Sandra Paris said, and her fist shot out to clip Rita on the jaw.

By the time Rita came to a few minutes later, Sandra was tying her hands and feet. She tried to scream, but there was already a gag in her mouth, held in place with adhesive tape. "Now," Sandra said,

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hoisting her to her feet, "I'm going to put you in the maintenance closet across the hall. Just don't be noisy or something worse might happen to you. Understand me?"

Rita nodded, her eyes above the gag terrified. Working fast, Sandra checked the hallway to make sure it was still deserted, then half carried the girl across to the closet, leaving her on the floor on a pile of rags. She returned briefly to the dressing room and came back with Rita's street clothes and her tote bag, throwing the coat over the girl and the rest on the floor beside her. "I wouldn't want you to catch cold on my account," she laughed.

She was back in the dressing room slipping into Rita's saffron toga as two other young women arrived.

They looked at her a bit uncertainly and one of them asked, "Do you have the right costume?"

Sandra acted uncertain. "I think so."

"I'm Christina Black. At rehearsal last night my roommate was wearing that."

"What's her name?"

"Rita Mulroney."

Sandra relaxed. "That explains it. She was taken ill when she arrived this morning and the director pressed me into service."

Christina, a tall dark-haired girl with deep-brown eyes, seemed uncertain. "Where is she? Did they take her to the hospital?"

"I don't know. I don't think it was anything too serious."

The other dancers were drifting in and Sandra introduced herself to them. "What about the routines?" one of them asked her. "Do you know them?"

"Oh, sure," she said. "I was part of a group that did the same sort of thing up in Boston last month. These museum gigs are a cinch. The important thing is to look sexy without smiling. The Muses never smile."

One or two of the dancers looked at her a bit distastefully, but they all seemed to accept her for what she professed to be—a last-minute replacement. The nine girls were in their costumes when Samuel Pearlman appeared with the show's director and choreographer, a slim young man named Harvey Tort.

"Make it good," Pearlman told them. "We have to give these people something for being here at eight in the morning."

"Mr. Pearlman," Christina said, "my—"

The museum director shook his head impatiently and Harvey Tort gave them quick last-minute instructions as he herded them out the

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door and up the stairs to the Grand Atrium, where a dozen large tables had been set up and breakfast was being served to the assembled business leaders. They were mostly male, Sandra noted, with only a scattering of women in business suits. The other dancers went quickly into their act, but she lingered at the sidelines, faking a few basic dance steps. Harvey Tort spotted her and frowned. He started moving through the tables toward her side of the dance area.

Sandra spun around on her toes, out of the performance area, toward the near wall of the atrium, where an early Van Gogh, one of the museum's prize acquisitions, hung in a place of honor. From beneath her toga she pulled a small roadside flare. Yanking off the cap, she ignited it, and suddenly every eye in the room was on her.

She gave them her best smile as she tossed the flare at the center of the painting and watched it erupt in a flash of vivid flame.

Captain Leopold had visited the Parker Museum only once before, in the company of his wife Molly. By nature he wasn't a museum-goer, though he was secretly pleased when Molly made an effort to broaden his horizons. On that Tuesday morning in late September, the urgent call from Samuel Pearlman had brought both Leopold and Lieutenant Fletcher to the museum, where they found a police car, two fire engines, and a chief's car already blocking the street in front of the building.

"'We're all clear!" the fire chief called out to Leopold. "The rest of it's your job!"

"Thanks, Chief," Leopold waved as he went up the marble steps to the museum entrance with Fletcher.

An overweight man with thinning hair was waiting at the door for them. "I'm Samuel Pearlman, Inspector—"

"Captain Leopold. This is Lieutenant Fletcher. What's been going on here, sir?"

"A madwoman has destroyed one of our most valuable paintings—a Van Gogh worth millions!"

Leopold followed him inside. "Who are all these people?"

"We were having a fund-raising breakfast as part of our expansion drive. Nearly a hundred business and civic leaders were invited."

Leopold recognized several of them now—a judge, some lawyers, a prominent real-estate developer, a couple of bankers. But his attention was diverted at once to a scorched section of the atrium wall, where an empty frame about eighteen by twenty-four inches hung

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as a bleak reminder of the outrage. "Was the woman apprehended?" he asked the director.

"No. Somehow she escaped in all the smoke and confusion. She left this card stuck to the wall beneath the painting."

Leopold stared at it:

THE WHITE QUEEN

Impossible Things Before Breakfast

"Check this out," he said, handing it to Fletcher. "See if anyone has a record on her."

"She tied up one of the dancers and took her place," Pearlman explained. "Luckily our choreographer found her."

"What dancers?" Leopold asked.

"The entertainment! We hired this man Harvey Tort to put on an entertainment while breakfast was served. He does this kind of thing for conventions and trade shows all the time. He hired nine dancers in New York to represent the nine Muses. He thought it would be appropriate in the museum setting."

"And this madwoman, as you call her, substituted herself for one of the other dancers?"

"Exactly! She hurled a lighted flare at the Van Gogh painting and completely destroyed it!"

Leopold stepped closer to the damage, running his forefinger over the inside of the slightly charred frame. The police photographer and fingerprint man had arrived, and after another moment's examination he turned it over to them. "Let's go talk to this dancer she tied up," he said.

Pearlman led the way to the basement room where a pale young woman wearing a body stocking and a raincoat sat huddled on a chair. A slender man and a dark-haired girl of about twenty were with her, trying to comfort her. The man, as Leopold thought, was Harvey Tort. "You found her?" Leopold asked him.

Tort nodded. "After the trouble upstairs, I realized that Rita hadn't been ill as the girls told me the woman claimed. I came down to look for her and found her tied and gagged in a closet across the hall. I was calling her name when I heard a pail overturned in there. When I opened the door I found her inside."

Leopold smiled at the young woman. Her eyes were red from her ordeal. "Could you tell me your name, Miss—?"

"Rita Mulroney."

"I'm her roommate at the hotel," the dark-haired girl volunteered. "Christina Black. She left before I did this morning."

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Rita nodded. "I was the first one here. Mr. Pearlman let me in. I was changing into my costume when this woman came in."

"Can you describe her?"

"Good-looking, blonde hair, about my height, maybe in her mid-thirties."

Leopold made a few notes. "Tell me what happened."

"I was changing into my costume. When she arrived she said she was one of the Muses, though she hadn't been at rehearsal. I asked where her costume was and she said I was wearing it. Then she socked me in the jaw." She worked her mouth a little. "It's still sore. The next thing I knew she had me gagged and was tying my hands and feet. She must have known the others would be arriving any minute because she dragged me across the hall to that maintenance closet and left me there."

"What did you do?"

"I struggled with my bonds for what seemed like an hour. I could hear sirens and a lot of commotion upstairs. I was finally beginning to loosen the ropes around my hands when I heard Harvey calling my name. I was still gagged but I kicked my tote bag with my feet and managed to hit a metal pail. He heard the noise and found me."

"You didn't see this woman again after she tied you up?"

Rita shook her head. "But she told me her name. She said it was Sandra Paris."

"Probably fake, but we'll check it."

The dressing room the girls had used obviously served as a locker room for the museum's employees and security staff. A line of metal lockers stretched along one wall, with benches in front of them. Leopold opened some of the locker doors and saw the Muses' street clothes hanging inside. "Which was your locker?" he asked. Rita showed him and he opened the door. There was only a blue raincoat inside. "Is this yours?"

Rita frowned. "I think that belonged to Sandra Paris. You know, now that I think of it I don't believe she was wearing anything but underwear beneath it."

Leopold went quickly through the pockets, certain they'd be empty. What he found surprised him. It was an empty matchbook on which had been written: *135YYZ.*

He was still pondering it when Fletcher hurried in. "Captain, we've got trouble."

"This White Queen business?"

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"No word on that yet, but Pearlman has found two more valuable paintings missing, cut from their frames."

"All right, I'll come look."

"That's not all."

"What else?"

"There's a dead man in the parking lot."

The body was slumped behind the wheel of a mini-van parked in the museum lot. One of Fletcher's men had spotted it while checking out the escape route Sandra Paris must have used. The victim was a white male and his driver's license gave them the rest of the information. "Name: Frederick Farley," Leopold read. "Thirty-one years old and residence in Rye, over in Westchester County. Has this car New York plates?"

"Yeah," Fletcher confirmed, "I'll run a check on it."

"Shot once in the right temple. Powder burns. The killer was probably sitting next to him. Small-caliber weapon. With the windows closed like this, the sound wouldn't have carried far."

"You're thinking of a gang hit?" Fletcher asked.

"More likely a falling-out among thieves. Maybe this was meant to be her getaway car. But if that's the case, how did she get away?"

"The medical examiner's on his way. Maybe he can tell us the time of death."

Leopold studied the spots of blood on the dashboard. "More than a couple of hours and this blood would be dried." He went around and glanced at the car's license number. It was nothing like *135YYZ*. He handed the matchbook to Fletcher. "While you're checking out the car run a check on this number, too."

"License plate?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

The police photographer, finished inside the museum, had been summoned to the parking lot. Samuel Pearlman was right behind him. "What's this about a murder?" the museum director asked.

"Looks like it," Leopold confirmed. "Did you ever see this man before? His driver's license says his name is Frederick Farley."

"No, the name means nothing to me."

"Take a look at him. A former employee, perhaps? One of your guards?"

Pearlman made a distasteful face as he peered through the window at the body. "No. I never saw him before."

Some of the others had come out, too—including Harvey Tort and

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a few of the Muses. Tort also failed to identify the man and Leopold wasn't about to parade the city's business leaders past the body. One, a judge named Wilbur, did come forward, however. "How are you, Captain?"

"Good morning, Judge. Sorry your breakfast was interrupted."

Wilbur had a mane of white hair and the manner of a judge. Leopold often wished that he lived up to his appearance in the decisions and sentences he handed down from the bench. "I understand that madwoman killed someone in addition to destroying a painting."

Leopold didn't answer. Instead he said, "Excuse me, Judge," and moved away. "Mr. Pearlman, if you could show me where those paintings were stolen—"

The museum director led him through a side entrance and up a short flight of stairs. Halfway down the wall was an empty frame about eight by thirteen inches—smaller than the Van Gogh. A uniformed museum guard stood by it. The card beneath the empty frame identified the missing painting as a Matisse.

"Worth how much?" Leopold asked.

"You're talking in the millions," Pearlman said, "just like the Van Gogh that was destroyed. Here's the other one." On the opposite wall, farther down the gallery, was another empty frame. "This was a Manet."

"Three of your most valuable paintings?"

"They certainly were. The French are bringing fabulous sums at art auctions these days."

"This one is twenty-one by seventeen inches." Leopold examined the frame. "Both cut out with a razor blade, I'd guess. Where were your guards while this was happening?"

"When the fire alarm went off, everyone hurried to the atrium. That woman destroyed the painting as a diversion, so her partner, the man in the car, could get in and steal these two paintings."

"We found no paintings in the car."

"Of course not—she killed him and took them herself."

"Possibly," Leopold conceded.

He ordered the fingerprint team to dust the area, but he already suspected they'd find nothing—just as he was certain there'd be no record of anyone called Sandra Paris or the White Queen.

On that he was wrong. As the body was being removed shortly

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before eleven o'clock, Fletcher hurried up to him. "The van belonged to the dead man. He's a small-time crook with a small-time record. This hardly seems like his type of job."

"Maybe someone hired him as a driver."

"Just what I was thinking, Captain. How about Sandra Paris?"

"Did you find anything under that name?"

"Sandra Paris, alias the White Queen. Several arrests, suspicion of robbery and grand theft, but only one conviction. She served a year in New Jersey for stealing a roulette wheel from an Atlantic City casino."

"A roulette wheel?"

"Apparently she goes in for unusual or difficult thefts, always committed in the early morning, before breakfast. That 'Impossible Things Before Breakfast?' is something the White Queen said in *Through the Looking Glass*. It's sort of a trademark with her."

"What about *135YYZ?*"

"No idea, Captain."

"At least we're not dealing with a madwoman, or with someone who would destroy a valuable painting simply to divert attention from the theft of two others."

"Everyone saw her destroy the painting," Fletcher pointed out.

"Then the impossible thing would be if she *didn't* destroy it," Leopold suggested.

The blue raincoat Sandra Paris had left behind was sent to the police lab, though Leopold doubted they'd find anything useful. It seemed inexpensive and newly purchased for the occasion.

At noon he noticed a number of cars driving up to the museum doors. "What's going on?" he asked Harvey Tort.

"Mr. Pearlman thinks we should proceed with the other fund-raisers. The dancers are here and the food is ordered. Even though the paintings are insured, he feels this morning's events make the necessity for expansion and tighter security more important than ever."

Leopold nodded. "I'll come up and watch," he said.

The invited guests at the luncheon were mainly female, women who would consider themselves the social and artistic leaders of the community. Leopold watched them dine on elaborate salads while being entertained by the nine dancing Muses. The pitch for money would come at the end, and Samuel Pearlman stood at Leopold's side during the performance, waiting for the proper moment.

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As the applause died down at the conclusion of the dance, Leopold asked him, "What would a thief do with those paintings? They're hardly something you could take to the local fence."

"I imagine she'd try to get them out of the country. There are art collectors in Europe and the Far East who would pay vast sums with no questions asked."

"Out of the country," Leopold repeated, and glanced at his watch. It was five minutes to one.

As the girls ran by on their way down to the makeshift dressing room, he caught Rita Mulroney by the arm. "Come with me," he said.

"Where to?"

Leopold reassured her. "Don't worry, you're not under arrest. I may need your help in identifying someone."

"Who?"

"Sandra Paris."

On the way out of the parking lot, he called to Fletcher to follow him.

"Where to?"

"The airport. Come on! We've got to hurry!"

Sandra Paris gave a final tug to her black wig and was satisfied with her appearance in the Ladies Room mirror. She picked up the oversized briefcase and walked out just as her flight was being called. "Now boarding, Flight 348 to Toronto, Canada, with a 1:35 departure."

She paused at the security checkpoint while the uniformed woman eyed the briefcase. "That's too big for our X-ray," she said. "You'll have to open it."

"Gladly," Sandra said, unzipping the top and sides. "It's advertising art, for a client in Toronto."

"You'll have to show that to Customs over there."

"No problem."

Sandra rezipped her case and started walking toward the line at her gate. There was a young woman standing with an older man and somehow she looked familiar. The woman was staring at her and Sandra suddenly remembered where she'd seen her before.

"I think that's her," Rita Mulroney was saying. "Her hair is different, but—"

The older man smiled and asked politely, "Sandra Paris?"

"You must be mistaken. My name is—"

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"I'm Captain Leopold," he said, showing his badge. "I'll have to ask you to come with me for questioning."

She was thinking she could outrun this man any day of the week, and he wasn't likely to use his gun in an airport crowded with passengers. She started to turn and Leopold shouted, "Grab her, Fletcher!" and suddenly there was another man pinning her arms.

They took her down to police headquarters and sat her on a hard wooden chair in the squadroom while the one named Fletcher carefully read off her rights. When he was finished, Leopold came out of his office holding one of the big advertising layouts from her briefcase, carefully matted, mounted, and easeled. "You do advertising for the First Bank of Toronto?" he asked.

"That's one of my clients. It's for a full-page newspaper ad."

He stripped away the backing cardboard and carefully lifted out an oil painting of some farmers working in a wheat field. "I'm sure Mr. Pearlman will be delighted to recover the Van Gogh he thought you destroyed this morning, Miss Paris. Where are the other two?"

"The other two what?"

"The paintings you stole along with this one."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"We found Mr. Farley's body, Sandra," he said, switching to her first name. "We're talking about murder."

She sat for a full minute in silence. "Well?" Leopold asked.

Sandra moistened her lips. "Do I get one phone call?"

"Certainly. Do you want to call your lawyer?"

"No," she answered. "A friend over in Westchester. His name is Nick Velvet."

It had been a busy Tuesday afternoon for Nick Velvet. He and Gloria had decided the sailing season was over and had been at the yacht club arranging winter storage for the boat. Then there were some calls to return on his answering machine, and some mail to read. He'd just opened a beer and settled down to relax when the phone rang again. He let the answering machine handle it until he heard a woman's voice saying, "Nick, this is Sandra Paris—"

He picked up the receiver. "Sandra! How are you?"

"Thank heaven you're there! I'm having a bad day."

"Where are you?"

"At the moment? In jail about fifteen miles east of you."

"Jail! What happened?"

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"Can you come here? I got you out of jail once—I've been wondering if you might return the favor."

"Tell me where you are. I'll be there."

Nick explained to Gloria that Sandra Paris was in trouble. They hadn't seen her in a couple of years, but she had indeed rescued Nick from prison once, at Gloria's behest. "You'd better go see what you can do," Gloria agreed.

"It's just over the state line," Nick said. "I'll try to be back tonight."

He drove immediately to police headquarters, where a man with greying hair and piercing blue eyes introduced himself as Captain Leopold. Nick had a feeling he wasn't the sort of cop you'd want on your tail. "I'm Nick Velvet. I've come to see Sandra Paris."

"Are you acting as her attorney?" Leopold asked.

"No, just a friend. I hope to get her out of here."

"Bail won't be set until morning, and there may be no bail in a capital case. She did tell you she's being held on suspicion of murder, didn't she?"

Nick didn't answer directly. "I'd like to speak with her."

"I suppose that's allowed, since she seems to have chosen you over a lawyer. Just what is your occupation, Mr. Velvet?"

"I'm a free-lance consultant," Nick told him.

Leopold led him to a private room used by lawyers. "I'll have Miss Paris brought in."

Nick waited only a few minutes before she appeared, opening the door and striding into the bleak room as if she were in her own home. "It's good to see you again, Nick."

His first thought was that she was still a very attractive woman. He'd sometimes fantasized about the two of them teaming up, using their combined talents, but he had been a loner for too long. Besides that, it was difficult to imagine, after all these years, a woman other than Gloria in his life. If there ever was one, though, it would be Sandra Paris.

"How did you end up here?" he asked.

She glanced around at the room. "Do you want the whole story? I imagine the walls have ears in this place."

"Tell me what you can."

"There's a fund-raiser going on today at the Parker Museum of Fine Art. They imported some dancers from New York to perform as the nine Muses while about a hundred business leaders had breakfast in the main atrium. One of the girls claims I slugged her in the

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downstairs dressing room, hid her in a broom closet, then took her place in the dance."

Nick smiled at the thought. "You've added dancing to your other talents?"

"Enough to get by. Anyway, then they say I lit a flare and tossed it at a Van Gogh painting worth several million dollars, utterly destroying it."

Nick grinned again. "Up in flames. I'll bet not a shred of canvas remained."

"You've got it. Of course I escaped during the uproar, but here's the complication. While escaping, they have me cutting two more valuable paintings from their frames and then pausing in the parking lot to put a bullet through the head of my getaway driver."

"I thought you worked alone, like me."

"Of course I do—the whole thing is ridiculous. But how do I prove it? How do I get myself out of this mess?"

"It seems as if someone took advantage of your presence to do a little work of their own."

"But who was the man in the car and why was he killed? I certainly didn't need him. I had my own rental car."

"How did they catch you?"

She bowed her head. "I'm embarrassed to admit to it, Nick. So I could change quickly into the Muse costume, I left my dress in the car and just wore a cheap raincoat over my underwear. I abandoned it there and accidentally left a matchbook in the pocket with my flight time and destination on the inside flap. *135YYZ*. That was 1:35, and I used the airport code for Toronto—YYZ—the way some people refer to Los Angeles as LAX for its airport code. Even after I realized I'd left it in the pocket, I wasn't worried. I didn't think there was a cop in town smart enough to figure it out before my plane left."

"And?"

"There was one. His name is Leopold."

Nick nodded. "I met him."

"But I've talked enough."

Maybe too much, Nick was thinking, if they had the room bugged. "What do you want me to do?"

"Get me out of here."

"That might not be easy. You've got to tell me the truth, Sandra. Do you have any idea who killed the man in the car?"

"No."

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"Or who stole those other two paintings?"

"No."

"But they did find the Van Gogh in your possession. That one's going to be hard to deny."

"I'm depending on you, Nick. I did the same for you once."

What she'd done for him was to pose as a matron and help him escape from jail. He didn't feel up to duplicating her feat, though he'd come prepared for something similar. "Let me talk to this Captain Leopold and see what he's got. Meanwhile, write out for me every detail of what you did."

She wrote for about ten minutes on a lined legal pad, then tore off the sheets and handed them to him. Nick glanced over them, reading the details of her entering the museum, substituting the color reproduction for the real Van Gogh, hiding the Van Gogh in the basement near the door to the parking lot, and then attacking Rita Mulroney.

"I couldn't risk a guard stopping me on the way out with the Van Gogh under my coat," she'd written. "I had to divert them with the fire. That way I was able to retrieve the painting and make my escape. The apparent destruction of the Van Gogh served another purpose, too. I knew they'd discover soon enough it wasn't canvas that burned, but it would give me a few hours to be on a plane out of the country before they realized the painting was stolen and not destroyed."

Nick read it over once more carefully, and then tucked it in an inside pocket.

He found Leopold waiting for him in a glass-enclosed office off the squadroom having a cup of coffee. Nick accepted a cup, though at the moment he felt more in need of a cold beer. "Have you finished speaking with your client?" Leopold asked him with a smile that was more ironic than friendly.

"I'm not really an attorney, Captain. I'm sure Miss Paris explained that to you."

"She did. I don't quite understand why you're here, Mr. Velvet, but of course we ran a check on you." He held up several sheets of paper. "These fax machines are great little gadgets. I don't know how we ever managed without ours. I had a report on Sandra Paris earlier in the day, and now I have one on you." He raised his eyes from the papers. "Yours is longer than hers."

Nick smiled. "I'm older. More years on the job."

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"Do people really hire you to steal items of little or no value?"

"There have been stories to that effect."

"Quite a few arrests here, but no convictions."

"I'm no criminal, Captain. I perform a service. I'm here today to see about obtaining the release of Sandra Paris."

"There isn't any possibility of that at this stage. The district attorney is requesting she be held without bail."

"The painting was recovered," Nick reminded him.

"The other two haven't been, and there's the murder charge as well."

"You have no evidence implicating her in that or anything else."

"We have Rita Mulroney's statement of what happened. Here it is."

Nick read it over. "Has the fax machine identified the dead man?"

"His driver's license did that. His name was Frederick Farley—from Rye, New York. You come from over that way, don't you?"

"I do, but I never heard of Farley."

Leopold picked up another sheet of paper. "Small-time hood. Handsome, though. The sort someone like Sandra Paris might have teamed up with."

"She didn't. She works alone."

"You're telling me she pulled off that museum stunt alone? I don't believe that."

"*I* could pull it off alone," Nick said. "I could duplicate it."

"And destroy another painting? Not a chance."

"You're still convinced the Van Gogh was destroyed? Then what did you find in her briefcase?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. "Maybe a copy. It's being examined by the museum's director, Mr. Pearlman."

"If I stole something other than a painting in exactly the same manner, would you believe it could be done?"

"What would that prove about the killing?"

"You believe that Sandra's destruction of the Van Gogh was merely a diversion so she could steal the other two paintings and kill her partner. Is that a fair statement?"

"I'm leaning toward that theory," Leopold admitted, "but I'm not committed to it. When I examined the Van Gogh frame after the fire, it seemed to me that the painting might have been cut out of it. I just don't know how she managed it in full view of a hundred people."

"I'll show you," Nick promised.

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"What are you going to steal?"

Nick leaned back in his chair, watching the captain's eyes. "As you know, it has to be of little or no value. I'm not giving you an excuse to arrest me, too." He thought for a few seconds and said, "How about your badge?"

"No, you're not pulling anything like that."

"Come on, it's something personal that I can't duplicate on the spot. I have no idea what the number on it is, so you can easily verify that I stole the real thing. And I promise to return it immediately after the demonstration."

"And if you don't succeed?"

"Then I go back home and leave Sandra Paris to you and the courts. If I do convince you that her actions were completely separate from the other crimes, then we take it from there."

Leopold thought about it. Finally, he nodded. "All right, where do you intend your theft to take place?"

"At the Parker Museum of Fine Art, of course. Where else? All I need from you are the sizes of the other two missing paintings."

Nick took his own car and made just one quick stop on the way. He pulled into the surprisingly full parking lot only moments after Leopold, who was still standing by his unmarked car. A younger man he introduced as Lieutenant Fletcher was with him.

Nick was carrying a flat, thin package. "This seems like a busy place. I would have thought it would close up after a robbery. And a murder."

"Ordinarily I imagine it would, but they're launching a fund-raising campaign," Leopold explained as they walked toward the side entrance. "They scheduled breakfast, luncheon, and dinner events today for prospective donors. The dinner guests should be arriving within the hour. That man smoking a cigarette at the door is the man who designed the dancers' choreography."

Harvey Tort seemed upset to find the police back on the scene. "What is it now, Captain? I hope you're not going to question the girls again. Some of them are very nervous. The robbery was bad enough. When they learned of the murder, they were ready to head back to New York."

"Will they all be going back tonight?" Leopold asked him.

"As soon as we finish this performance."

Nick glanced at his watch. "What time do you start?"

"Our performance is at seven."

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"Plenty of time, but I think we might avoid the crowd by using another part of the museum. Lead the way, Captain."

As they entered the side door, they encountered two of the costumed Muses. Leopold spoke to them both and introduced Nick.

"This has been a terrible day," one of them, tall and dark-haired, said. "After this dance, we're out of here—I've never been so frightened in my life."

Nick smiled at her. "You aren't the one who was knocked out by the thief, are you?"

"No, that was Rita here."

The other young woman said, "I'm Rita Mulroney. I don't have to answer more questions, do I?"

"If you could just run quickly through what happened—"

"She popped me on the jaw and when I woke up she had me bound and gagged, very tight. She hauled me across the hall to a closet and dumped me on the floor, and my things after me." Nick nodded. Sandra's written account had been truthful. "Later, when I heard fire engines I was terrified. I managed to kick out with my feet and make some noise. Harvey found me and untied me."

The choreographer nodded. "By that time, the damage had been done. One painting destroyed and two others stolen, plus a man shot to death in the parking lot." He took out his car keys. "If you'll excuse me, Captain, I have to get fresh togas for the dancers."

Nick watched Tort and the two dancers until they reached a blue van at the side of the lot. It reminded him of something. "How did Sandra get from here to the airport?" he asked Leopold.

"The same way she got here in the first place. A rental car. We found the papers for it in her purse. The car had been returned to the agent at the airport."

Nick grunted.

"What does that mean?"

"Well, I assumed you thought the dead man in the parking lot was her accomplice and getaway driver. But she didn't need one, did she?"

"We're still working on their relationship," Leopold admitted. "But what about stealing my badge? Have you given up on that?"

"Not at all. Let's go take a look at where those other two paintings were stolen."

They reentered the wing of the building off the parking lot, one level below the Grand Atrium where the dinner performance was to be held. Nick was aware that Lieutenant Fletcher's eyes never

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left him, and he knew he was in grave danger of ending up in a jail cell himself. He followed Leopold along a corridor lined with paintings on both walls, until the grey-haired detective stopped before an empty frame.

"Here's one. The other is over there."

Nick peered closely at the frame. There was no damage to it at all, only a few strands of canvas along the inner edges where a sharp razor blade had done its work. "Was the painting you found in Sandra's possession cut out in the same manner?"

"It seemed to be. Only the witnesses all swear she couldn't have done it. They saw the painting burn."

"Well, I think I can duplicate anything Sandra comes up with." Nick took a piece of stiff paper from the flat package he'd been carrying. "I stopped at an art supply store on the way over and had this cut to the exact size we need to fit the frame—eight by thirteen inches." He quickly secured it to the frame with bits of tape. "Now if you'll take your badge, Captain, and pin it to this paper, exactly in the center."

Leopold and Fletcher exchanged glances. Then, with some reluctance, Leopold removed his leather identification holder from an inside coat pocket and unpinned the badge. He went to the frame and attached it to the center of the stiff white paper.

"I'll have to ask both of you to move back," Nick told them. "I'm going to use a flare exactly the way she did upstairs."

"I don't know about this," Leopold said, having second thoughts.

"Lieutenant Fletcher, would you get a fire extinguisher from the wall down there? I'm sure the fire won't spread, but you can keep it ready just in case."

Leopold nodded to Fletcher, who went to remove the fire extinguisher while Nick stepped up to the frame and made a final adjustment. "There, that's just right. Both of you stand back now." He took a highway flare from his jacket pocket.

"Where'd you get that?" Leopold asked.

"From my car. Most auto first-aid kits are equipped with them."

They were standing about twenty-five feet from the frame where Leopold's badge was on display. Nick tore off the end of the flare, igniting it, and tossed it with a sure aim directly at the badge.

There was a sudden flash of light and flame. Fletcher lifted the nozzle of the fire extinguisher. "Wait!" Leopold cautioned, holding up his hand. The flare fell harmlessly to the floor.

The fire quickly burned down to some charred paper, barely

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scorching the frame. Leopold's badge was nowhere to be seen. It wasn't in the frame or on the floor beneath it. It was simply gone.

"A good trick, Mr. Velvet," Leopold commented. "You should go on the stage. Now where is it?"

Nick smiled. He dropped a hand into his pocket, took out Leopold's badge, and handed it to him. "Now are you convinced that Sandra could have done the same thing?"

Leopold checked the badge number—946. It was his, all right. His immediate reaction was mixed. The man was nothing but a clever criminal and yet Leopold had to admire the way he'd brought it off, with both Fletcher and himself watching.

"How'd he do that, Captain?" Fletcher asked.

"The only time he came in contact with the badge at all was while you were getting the extinguisher. He made the switch then, when he walked up to the frame to adjust the badge. His back blocked it from my view just for an instant."

"That's all I needed," Nick said. He was smiling, enjoying himself.

"Switched it for what?" Fletcher wanted to know. "If he switched it for another badge, what happened to that one?"

Leopold turned to Nick. "Do you want to answer?"

"Not just yet. I think we have to reach an agreement about Sandra Paris first."

"Let's go sit down," Leopold suggested. "This might take a while."

The music was beginning upstairs. Fletcher suggested it might be wise for him to keep an eye on things up there. "We've had enough surprises for one day," he said.

"Good idea," Leopold told him. "Go ahead."

There were a pair of chairs at the end of the corridor, and though they looked like antiques Leopold could see no warning that they couldn't be sat upon. He took one and motioned Nick to the other. "I'm not as good on my feet as I used to be," he explained. "Just a year from retirement and some days my wife doesn't think I should wait that long. But then people like Sandra Paris and Nick Velvet come to town and it makes the whole thing worthwhile."

"I'm glad of that," Nick replied, sitting on the chair across from Leopold's.

"Tell me your theory of what happened," Leopold said.

"Well, you're investigating three different crimes here—the theft of the Van Gogh that Sandra pretended to burn, the theft of the

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other two paintings from this lower corridor, and the death by shooting of the man in the car."

"Frederick Farley."

"Yes, Farley. I believe your mistake was in trying to hang all three crimes around Sandra's pretty neck." Nick shifted in his seat. "I think I can show you how unlikely it is that Sandra committed either of the other crimes. First of all, the other two paintings. Your original theory was that she threw the flare at the Van Gogh as a diversion while Farley cut the other two paintings from their frames. Then she went out to the parking lot, killed Farley, and took them."

"What's wrong with that?"

"Several things. First, if Sandra stole the other two paintings, where are they? Why weren't they with the Van Gogh when you grabbed her at the airport? Second, assuming Farley was an accomplice and getaway driver, why did she need him when she had a rental car waiting for her?"

"I told you she needed him to steal the other paintings," Leopold replied.

Nick shook his head. "That would make sense if the Van Gogh business was merely a diversion, but it wasn't. She was after that painting and she got it. She entered the museum early, posing as one of the dancers, and sliced it from the frame while the guards weren't looking—a skillful person can do it in seconds, as museum directors are discovering to their sorrow. *Then* she went downstairs and attacked Rita Mulroney for her costume."

"But the painting was still there when the dancers began their performance," Leopold objected.

"What people saw, if they bothered to glance in that direction at all with so much else going on, was a full-color reproduction of the Van Gogh, actual size, probably cut from a poster or a coffee-table art book. It wouldn't fool anyone for a minute, unless they were twenty feet away with their minds on something else. That's what burned up so quickly, no doubt aided by a sheet or two of flash paper. You should know that an oil painting on canvas wouldn't burn that fast, and a thrown flare probably wouldn't even ignite it."

"Flash paper?" Leopold repeated.

"Chemically treated tissue paper that magicians often use. It disappears instantly with a bright flash when set afire."

"That's the same thing you used just now."

"Yes," Nick said.

"But the badge—"

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"I happened to have a detective's badge like yours with me. On the way here, when I stopped at the art-supply shop, I was able to use a color copying machine. Nearly flat objects like badges reproduce quite well on sheets of paper: the effect is almost three-dimensional. Of course, the badge number was different from yours, but I hoped you'd be too far away to see that. I had to keep you and Lieutenant Fletcher a distance away so it would look like a real badge to you."

"You substituted that color copy when you went to adjust the badge."

"It was behind the top sheet all the time, with flash paper behind it. I simply loosened the tape and slid the sheet of heavy paper with your badge under my jacket. When I stepped away, the photocopy badge was still there. If the position was off by half an inch, you didn't notice it."

"And you just happened to have that duplicate badge with you." When Nick grinned, Leopold knew there was still something being held back. He decided not to press it, but said instead, "You gave me two reasons why Sandra only stole the Van Gogh. Any others?"

Nick nodded. "Yes. She was dancing with the others when you say the paintings were stolen and Farley was shot. Farley may have stolen the paintings, but when did she have time to shoot him? After she threw the flare? She was lucky to escape in the confusion. She certainly wouldn't have lingered to shoot her partner and search for the paintings. She'd have hopped in the van with him and waited until later to kill him. Besides, where could she conceal a gun in that skimpy costume?"

"Maybe he had the gun and she got it away from him."

"Granted—but the fact remains, she simply didn't have the time."

"You make a pretty good case," Leopold admitted. "But if Sandra didn't kill him and take those other pictures, who did?"

"Someone who took advantage of Sandra's caper to do a little thieving of their own. The trouble is, that theory doesn't explain the dead man in the parking lot."

Samuel Pearlman came down the stairs at that moment and saw them seated there. "Please, gentlemen, those chairs are not for sitting."

"Sorry," Leopold said, rising at once. Nick got to his feet more casually. "How about the painting we recovered? Is it the real Van Gogh?" Leopold asked Pearlman.

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"Yes, thank God. The dance is just over. After the main course is served, I'll unveil it for the guests."

"Is Harvey Tort taking the dancers back to New York in his van?" Leopold asked.

"No, just to the train station. Ten people in the van would be too uncomfortable for a long ride. They'll pick up their gear in the locker room and head for the station." He went off, leaving Leopold and Nick standing next to the chairs. "Seems like everyone has a van these days," Leopold observed. "Tort has one, and the murdered man had one."

"I wonder if they looked anything alike," Nick said.

They went out to the parking lot, where the first girls were arriving with their totes and raincoats. The evening had turned pleasant and the coats were no longer needed. "Bad guess," Leopold said at once. "Tort's van has windows at the sides and it's dark-blue. Farley's was a light-grey mini-van."

But Nick wasn't looking at the dark-blue van. He was staring at Christina Black's tote bag as she handed it to Harvey Tort. "Captain, if I give you the murderer and the missing paintings, can Sandra Paris go free?"

"I don't know about that. There are still the charges—"

"Hurry up—yes or no."

Leopold took a deep breath. "Yes, I'd see what could be done."

"Good." Nick stepped up to the line of dancers and tapped one of them on the shoulder. "Excuse me, could I inspect your tote, please?"

Leopold saw the little pistol appear from nowhere—saw it come up fast to aim at Nick. He moved more quickly than he had in months, knocking the girl to the parking-lot pavement as the gun slid away across the asphalt. Then he had her in his grasp, pinning her to the ground, as Fletcher ran up from somewhere to lend a hand, turning the twisted, angry face toward them.

It was the face of Rita Mulroney.

Fletcher had handcuffed her, read her her rights from the printed card he carried, and taken her to their car. Nick and Captain Leopold were standing by the van where Harvey Tort and the other girls sat waiting to leave for the station.

"I have to thank you," Nick told the detective. "It looks like you saved my life."

"I don't quite understand what I did," Leopold admitted, "but when you asked to see her tote bag, she went for her gun. I'll admit it

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surprised me. Rita Mulroney was the only person who couldn't have stolen those paintings and killed Farley. She was bound and gagged in a closet the entire time."

Nick shook his head. "You're looking at it wrong, Captain. She's the only one who *could* have done it. You know I was convinced Sandra wasn't responsible for the theft of the other two paintings or the killing. Yet the paintings were stolen, and Farley, with his criminal record, certainly seemed involved. I had to face the fact that two separate thieves chose today to rob the Parker Museum. Coincidence? Of course—but not as major as you might think. The fund-raising events had been well publicized, and gaining access to the museum by posing as one of the dancers must have appealed equally to Rita and to Sandra. They just went about it in different ways, with Rita managing to get herself hired as one of the Muses in New York."

"What about Farley?"

"At that point Rita thought she needed a getaway driver. She'd arrive with the other dancers, but she planned to escape as soon as she had the paintings. That meant someone had to be there with a car for her. And Farley's presence was the clue that pointed to her."

Tort stuck his head out of the van and asked when they would be allowed to leave. It was growing dark in the parking lot and the lights had been turned on. "A few more minutes," Leopold told him. "Go on, Nick."

"Of all the people in the museum, who would have needed a getaway car? Certainly not the guests or any of the staff or guards. Not the director, Samuel Pearlman. These people would have branded themselves as guilty if they'd fled the scene. Also, of course, the staff people wouldn't need the fund-raising event to gain access to the place. They worked there every day. If Farley was the getaway driver, he had to have been working with Tort or one of the nine dancers."

"I'll buy that," Leopold agreed. "If Pearlman—or anyone—stole the Manet and Matisse paintings on the spur of the moment, after Sandra's theft, he wouldn't have had Farley on the scene."

"Which of the ten could have done it? Tort was upstairs with the dancers the whole time. You told me Sandra only danced a few steps before hurling the flare. So he wouldn't have had time to slip away unnoticed. Christina Black and the other seven legitimate Muses were in full view of all the guests. Only Rita Mulroney was missing. Only she could have used that brief time to slice the paintings from

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their frames. More important, only Rita knew that another robbery was afoot. With Sandra Paris to take the blame, Rita no longer needed her getaway driver. She had a perfect alibi and could safely return to New York with the other dancers. Better yet, the stolen paintings were all hers, with no need to cut Farley in on the proceeds. She took that pistol from her tote bag or her coat, and shot him in his car, stopping to steal the paintings before or after. Then she returned to the maintenance closet, retied herself the best she could, and when she heard the sirens and uproar she made some noise so she'd be found. Sandra would be blamed for the killing."

"Wait a minute," Leopold protested, "you're forgetting that Sandra left her tied tightly hand and foot, wearing only a dancer's body stocking. How did she get free in the first place?"

"Maybe it's the sort of case that needs a criminal mind to solve it, Captain. Rita came to the museum to steal those paintings, to pry them from their frames with a razor blade after she finished her dance. The razor blade had to be taped to her body where she could reach it when she needed it. She was able to reach it after Sandra left her tied hand and foot, and used it to cut through the ropes and get free."

"And she put on her raincoat and got out and cut the paintings from the frames. So where are the canvases?"

Nick had been holding Rita Mulroney's tote bag. He bent and unzipped it. "They're here, curved to fit inside a special pocket in the bag's outer lining."

He pulled them free and handed them over. "The larger painting is only twenty-one by seventeen inches—they both fit easily into the tubular side of this bag."

Leopold held out his hand. "I have to thank you, Velvet. You should have been a detective."

Nick smiled at the thought. "Now what about Sandra Paris?" he said.

At ten o'clock the following morning, Sandra was led into the courtroom. Nick had already spoken with her and told her everything had been explained to Judge Wilbur.

When the judge peered down at her from the bench, she remembered him from the breakfast performance the previous morning. "Sandra Paris, the charge against you has been reduced to malicious mischief. How do you plead?"

"Guilty, your Honor."

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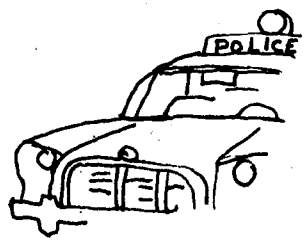
"I'm sentencing you to thirty days in jail but am suspending the sentence due to extenuating circumstances. You are also fined five hundred dollars." He rapped his gavel. "Next case."

In the car, Nick told her everything that had happened. "Well," she said as he concluded, "I asked you to get me out of jail and you did. But I don't understand how you happened to have a detective's badge from this police department in your pocket."

Nick smiled as he turned onto the turnpike toward Westchester County. "You got me out of jail once by posing as a prison matron. I'd planned to impersonate a detective to get you out. As it happened, the badge came in handy in a different way. Give it back, Sandra."

Smiling, she slipped it back into his pocket. "Still, that Leopold's no dope."

Nick agreed. "I think we'd both better steer clear of this city in the future."



DETECTIVERSE

OBSTACLE COURSE

by REYNALDA C. MONDRAGÓN

The thief takes off into the night,
Running fast with all his might—
Sirens scream and red lights flash!
Where to stash this newfound cash—
With his wife or with his brother?
Problem solved by a manhole cover!

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Here to help us celebrate our 50th is the multi-talented Phyllis Diller with a wickedly surprising new story . . .

A BAD PENNY

by PHYLLIS DILLER

The staff adored Dr. Hemming. He was, all agreed, the most brilliant scientist at the space center, a kind, gentle man, considerate and the best boss of any of the NASA projects. He would certainly have licked the problem of the ST 104 if it hadn't been for his wife.

Marion Hemming was beyond shrew. She was dedicated to making her husband's personal life hellish. It was no wonder that his unhappiness distorted his thinking and often clouded his judgment.

The project should have been child's play for such a brilliant mind. In the past, before his unfortunate marriage, Harold Hemming created concepts of glowing clarity. While an undergraduate at M.I.T., he formulated theories of chaos that had in themselves led to new systems of mathematics. Later, his work on space travel inspired a whole generation of students. He was only fifty-one, physically and mentally at his peak. Had he been able to concentrate at work, the ST 104 would have been a thing of scientific beauty racing through the sky. Instead, nine times this year he'd been forced to push down on the bright-red Destruct button. The puff of grey that had been a missile a moment before was always grimly beautiful in the sky. It was also a reminder of failure, with each succeeding mishap tearing at the fabric, reputation, and soul of this genius.

Sitting in the space-center commissary, Dr. Hemming's co-workers felt entitled to sip their coffee, pick at their pie, or, as in Joe Kemp's case, the grapefruit sections that reflected a fifth attempt to diet that week, and enjoy a few moments of lusty hate for Marion Hemming.

"She's an animal," said Carl Cameron, the mathematician of the group. "I went over to the house last Sunday. Hemming wanted my vector integers for tomorrow's launch. She was cursing him out because she'd written some bad checks. It was his fault."

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Ann Golding nodded, saying, "Everything's his fault, she says."

Carl went on, "Then she bellowed because her car was acting up. How could that man love her?"

"Explain love," said Frances Norton, trying to sound wiser than her thirty-eight years.

"Do you know," Joe said seriously, "I once ran 'Love' through the computer."

Frances interrupted, "No wonder we can't solve the ST 104. When we get our computer time, Joe plays games."

Joe pretended not to have heard and went on, "The computer gave me an Abort."

"Let's give Marion an Abort," Ann said. "Why did she come back to him, anyway? They have zilch over zero in common."

"The last time she left—" Frances started, only to have the newest member of the staff cut in.

"The last time?" Evan Cho asked. "Does she make a habit of leaving?"

"Not often enough," said Elroy Schwartz, who'd been sitting silently until then.

"Welcome to our group," Joe said. "You do speak."

"I was busy thinking of an excuse I could tell my kids after tomorrow's wipeout," Elroy explained. "My big one doesn't tell anybody I'm in the program any more."

Carl leaned forward and spoke, his throat raspy with feeling. "I love that man so much. I could kill Marion, I swear I could."

"I'll share the gas chamber with you," said Ann.

"You may not have to," Evan said slowly. He squinted, shrinking his Asian eyes as if to concentrate a laser of thought on his plan. "This is a very good plan," he said finally. "Are we all in on it?"

"Aren't we supposed to know what it is before we commit?" Ann asked.

Carl waved off her objection. "We're all in," he said.

Ann nodded. Of course she was in on it. She raised her hand as if a vote had been called for.

"You have such long slender fingers," Frances said.

Elroy felt naked in the jeep. His six feet and two hundred pounds were impossible to hide with only the scarecrow that was the driver's post and wheel in front of him. He was also sorry that he was blond. The morning sun, he knew, caught every strand of his hair. He was certain that he could be seen by a viewer a thousand miles away.

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Sitting next to him, Evan was inscrutably relaxed. Dr. Hemming would leave the house soon. He had never been late to a meeting of section heads.

Evan nudged his companion as Hemming walked out of the house. Dr. Hemming hadn't been in the service, but he walked with an erect and proud swagger. He reminded Evan of an English sergeant-major. Evan had seen many while studying in Great Britain. Hemming folded his six-four into his white sportscar, his only luxury. In a moment, the car growled to life and Dr. Hemming drove off.

"Thank God he didn't look this way," Elroy said.

"Shall we go in?" Evan asked.

On the second ring, Marion Hemming opened the door. Three-quarters asleep, she grunted something that ended with a question mark.

"We don't want to bother you, Mrs. Hemming," Elroy said, "but we need some pietic files Dr. Hemming took home the other night."

"Harold just left."

"That's too bad," Evan said. "Did you notice if he'd taken any files with him?"

"No."

"Would you mind if we checked his desk?" Evan asked.

"It's important for today's launch," Elroy told her.

"Go ahead and look," Marion said. As the men moved off, she automatically started to primp herself. She straightened her floral bathrobe. Looking in the small mirror above the credenza, she adjusted her greying pageboy. Thus absorbed, she didn't see the men return. Nor did she feel the heavy chop against her carotid artery. As she slumped to the ground, Evan studied his hand for a moment. "Those carotid chops really work. I thought they only worked in the movies."

A little shaky, Elroy felt for Marion's pulse. "She's still alive."

"Let's help her along." Evan pulled a brocaded pillow from the dark-green couch and bent down. "She isn't a bad-looking woman."

Elroy got on his knees and added his weight against the pillow. In a few minutes, Marion Hemming was absolutely dead.

Ann tried to assure Frances that nothing would go wrong. Frances, only slightly anxious, said, as they turned off at the ramp that led to the center a mile away, "Today the guard may decide to do his duty and search the van. I have that kind of luck."

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"The guards have never looked through our vehicles. I've never even been stopped."

"You've never before had a corpse wedged under the back seat."

"Some of the men smuggle in lady friends. I suppose some of us have smuggled in a man or two."

"But no corpses."

"My first husband was like a corpse," Ann said, making a wry face. "He and our passenger might have gotten along."

At the gate, the guard, a boy of twenty or so with a ponytail sticking out from under the back of his cap, waved them on without a parsec's hesitation.

"Now that we're home safely," Ann said, "can you explain why Elroy and Evan couldn't have brought her in?"

"This is a team effort. We each have to do our part."

"You sound like the center director when we ask for a raise."

Behind the two scientists, Marion Hemming lay comfortably, oblivious to the speed bumps over which the van was bouncing as it raced toward the test site.

Joe tightened the last few titanium screws. Folded over almost in half, the corpse fit nicely into the corrugated instrument box. Carl agreed silently and tapped a Ta Ta on the side where the supposed contents were invoiced by stencil: almost four hundred thousand dollars' worth of measuring devices. He considered making a stencil and letting the world know that Marion Hemming was about to undertake a journey into sub-space.

The instrument box safe in the arms of the rubber-covered forklift, Carl drove to the ST 104, proud and erect in its launching pad. Around it, steam from the energizers hissed and formed white clouds. Joe walked behind the forklift. When it reached the temporary elevator, as Carl jockeyed the arms of the forklift, Joe eased the instrument box onto the elevator platform.

A Latin-looking mechanic came out of the shed at the foot of the launching pad. "There are instruments aboard already."

"We have to replace them," said Joe.

"What for?" the mechanic asked. "Nine seconds into the launch we abort, don't we?"

"We may be lucky today," Joe said.

"Wanna bet? Nine point thirty-five seconds, POW!"

The countdown was in progress. At two minutes before launch,

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Dr. Hemming walked into the monitoring room. He had faith in his crew. Having set the computers earlier with the agenda for the launch, he knew that his team would follow that agenda without modification. The Destruct button alone was his to engage. That step he had never relinquished.

Taking his place at the central monitor, he seemed to be listening to some music in his head. He started to hum. Carl looked at him, puzzled. It was a minute before launch.

Ann and Joe, also puzzled, glanced up from the monitors they shared, then looked at one another. Joe shrugged his shoulders.

At the far wall, where Elroy and Evan operated their computers, the music was at first drowned out by the drone of instruments. When Dr. Hemming's concert reached them, both men shook their heads as if to try to clear them of this strange sound. Was the old man cracking up?

Frances heard nothing, every atom of her being concentrated on counting down to launch. At one, she held her breath. Dr. Hemming said, "Launch!"

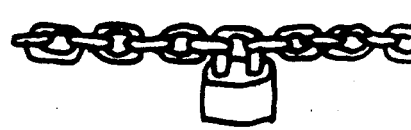
One second passed, then another, and another. At six, Joe said, "Prepare for Destruct magnification."

At ten seconds into the launch, Dr. Hemming smiled broadly and said, "No Destruct today, my dear friends."

The ST 104 started to its curved trajectory. The scientist went on, "We'll be able to bring it home. No fireworks, sorry." As the others sat stunned, he added, "I knew I had the right sidereal components today. Yes, there's much to be said for making up with one's wife." He beamed. "As of last night, there's a new Marion."

"That's nice," somebody said.

The ST 104 sailed on through a cloudless sky, eager to see as much of the solar system as it could before Dr. Hemming called it home, cargo and all.



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a distinguished reprint by

NICHOLAS BLAKE

"Henry, would you rather be killed by the Germans or enslaved by them?"

The young footman took his time, gazing levelly at them all. "If it comes to that, Miss Camelot," he said at last, "many might think I'm a slave already."

An intriguing story featuring Nigel Strangeways, first published in the U.S. in the February 1964 issue of EQMM, by C. Day Lewis writing as Nicholas Blake. C. Day Lewis (1904–1972), English poet, novelist, critic, and detective-story writer, was born in Ireland, the only son of an Irish Protestant clergyman. He was related through his mother to the poet-playwright Oliver Goldsmith. He became England's Poet Laureate in 1968. His first marriage, to Constance Mary King, ended in divorce. They had two sons. He later married actress Jill Balcon, and they had a daughter and a son. The latter, as many of you know, is Daniel Day Lewis, who last year won an Oscar for Best Actor for his unforgettable performance as Christy Brown in Granada Films' My Left Foot . . .

LONG SHOT

by NICHOLAS BLAKE

"His lordship," announced Amphlett as he received me in the hall, "his lordship is in the rookery, sir."

He crooked a little finger at the maid. "Alice, Mr. Strangeways' baggage. We have put you in your old room, sir. I trust you will enjoy your visit."

Did I detect a faint, quite unprofessional lack of conviction in the

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butler's tone? Why shouldn't I enjoy my visit? Any civilized person is bound to enjoy staying at a beautiful, perfectly run country house, where money is no object. Besides, Gervase was an old friend of mine, and I hadn't seen him for nearly two years.

"I think I'll go straight out," I said.

"Very good, sir. His lordship has been anticipating your arrival with the keenest pleasure."

I noticed that Gervase had still not succeeded in training dear old Amphlett to disregard his title. Twenty years ago, as a young man, Gervase had had a sort of Tolstoyan conversion. The eldest son of the Earl of Wessex, he had decided to give up his title and be called by the family name, plain Mr. Musbury. Friends, neighbors, relations, servants—all had to toe the line. That was the time he started to run his estate on a cooperative basis.

His struggles to become poor had been singularly unsuccessful, however. His cooperative farming prospered; the fortune left him in securities by his American mother throve on his neglect of it. And if he lost any friends through discarding his title, it may be assumed that they were not worth keeping anyway.

As we walked over the lawn, Amphlett delicately mopped his brow. It was certainly a very hot day for April. The cawing of rooks in the elm trees we were approaching sounded cool as a waterfall. I quite envied Gervase up there, but I didn't much fancy climbing the rope ladder to reach him.

Looking up, I descried a small object, which presently resolved itself into a ginger-beer bottle on a string descending erratically from the top of the nearest elm.

A young footman silently received it, took a fresh bottle from a silver tray, tied the string round its neck, and gave a signal to haul away. The bottle was drawn up again into the heights, toward a narrow, well camouflaged platform laid across two of the topmost branches.

"You've got a new footman, I see. A nice-looking young chap."

"Henry gives satisfaction, sir," said Amphlett gloomily, and not—I thought—with entire conviction.

"Been with you long?" I asked.

"Some eight months, sir."

Henry had held his job, under the exacting Amphlett, for eight months. Well, perhaps I was wrong. Perhaps he did give satisfaction.

"His lordship finds it very hot up there," remarked Amphlett.

I perceive that the reader may be feeling a certain resistance to

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my narrative. Either this friend of yours was a lunatic, he is saying, or else you're making the whole thing up. That is because he did not know Gervase Musbury.

Gervase was an eccentric who could afford to give his eccentricities a blank check and knew how to run them at a profit. Eccentricity, as I see it, is nothing more than the visible track of the libido taking a short cut to the desired object. When Amphlett told me his master was in the rookery, knowing Gervase I never doubted but that he was there for some rational purpose.

Equally, when I saw the bottle traveling up to that eyrie in the elm top, I accepted it as something quite natural; it was much simpler for Gervase to haul up his ginger-beer than for the footman to scale the rope ladder every time his master wanted a drink.

The ladder began to wriggle. Gervase had seen me and was climbing down—with great agility for a man approaching fifty. He jumped the last six feet, put his hands eagerly on my shoulders, and said, "You've not changed, Nigel."

Nor had he. The piercing blue eyes, the moustache cut like a thicker version of Adolphe Menjou's and appearing to bristle with electricity, the infectious manner of the enthusiast—Gervase was just the same.

"You'd better stay here, Henry," he said to the footman. "I'll be back presently." Then to me, "Henry gives me my bottles at regular intervals. Like a baby."

His blue eyes grew abstracted. "Let me see, Amphlett: who have we staying in the house? I am rather out of touch."

"Your brother and his wife, sir. Mr. Prew. And Miss Camelot."

"Ah, just so." He took my arm. "Better come and meet them. Get it over. Then we can spend the rest of the afternoon watching the rooks. Absorbing, I assure you. I built a nice little hide up there before the nesting season. Fit you in easily."

"No, Gervase," I said firmly. "There is not room for two on that appalling little platform. And I am not madly interested in the habits of rooks. Since when have you taken up birdwatching?"

"Just a relaxation, dear boy, that's all. I got a bit stale this winter, working on a new explosive. MacMaster called me in. Working against time—that's the trouble. We shall have war in two years. Or sooner."

We emerged from the shadow of the elm trees to be greeted by a small, stoutish man, whose photograph I had seen often enough in the papers. It was Thomas Prew, M.P., a notable defender of lost

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causes. If Gervase was right, the hardest-fought cause of Prew's life was now as good as lost, too, for he was an out-and-out pacifist, who had gone to prison for his convictions in the last war and cried them up and down the country ever since.

I was surprised to find the pacifist Member of Parliament here, and when we left Prew asked Gervase about it.

"Oh, Tom Prew's an honest man," he said. "Besides, he's an education for my brother. You know what an old warmonger Hector is. He and Tom had quite an argument at dinner the other night. Tom won on a technical knockout. Hector and Diana have barely been on speaking terms with him since. Let's go and find them."

We found them at last in the garage yard, up to the elbows in the engine of their Bentley. I had almost forgotten what a magnificent couple they made. Tall, handsome, golden-haired—there was something leonine about them, both in their restlessness and in repose. Hector had all his elder brother's superabundance of energy, but lacked Gervase's many outlets for it: war might well prove his release and metier.

Diana I admired without liking; she was too ambitious, too overpowering for my taste. Besides, she was wrapped up in her husband. They gave one, more than any other couple I ever met, the impression of being a team, of physical and mental coordination. I felt it again now, watching them as they worked in a sort of telepathic unison over the engine of the car in which they tore restlessly over the face of Europe.

My sensation was obviously shared by the beautiful Miss Anthea Camelot, who had been standing by with an odd-man-out expression on her face. She turned to Gervase with relief—and something more than relief, I fancied. Poor girl, I thought: if you were Circe and Sheba rolled into one, your enchantments would break against Gervase; the name written on his heart is burned too deep for any other woman to erase it.

Though ten years younger than Gervase, I had been for a long time his confidant. I was one of the very few people outside his own family who knew about the tragedy of Rose Borthwick. She had been the daughter of one of his father's tenant farmers. Gervase, in his youth, had fallen passionately in love with her. His father, knowing that Gervase was determined to marry the girl, had managed to have her sent away out of his reach.

There were terrible scenes and a final estrangement between Ger-

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vase and his father. Gervase had nearly gone off his head trying to find Rose again. But all his searches were in vain.

I was still thinking of this sad business a quarter of an hour later, as we were all at tea on the lawn. Presently the conversation turned to Hitler.

"We should have called his bluff long ago," said Hector Musbury. "If our politicians hadn't all got cold feet—"

"Your politicians have a responsibility, too," said Thomas Prew, in the beautiful deep voice that contrasted so strangely with his dumpy, rather insignificant figure. "Look at that young man"—he pointed toward Henry, who was standing a little distance away in the shadow of the elm trees. "Multiply him by several millions. Imagine those millions torn, maimed, rotting in the earth. Can you wonder if the politicians have cold feet?"

A shade of anger came over Hector's face. "That's just sentimental special-pleading. The alternatives are possible death or certain slavery for us. Evidently some of you people prefer the idea of being slaves."

Diana flicked a warning glance at him, I noticed. Anthea Camelot broke in, "But Mr. Prew wasn't talking about the politicians. He was talking about the people who'd have to be killed. About Henry. Let's see what *he* thinks. Henry!" she called.

The young footman came a few paces forward. There was a piquant blend of respectfulness and irony on his face.

"Henry, would you rather be killed by the Germans or enslaved by them?"

Henry took his time, gazing levelly at us all. "If it comes to that, Miss Camelot," he said at last, "many might think I'm a slave already."

I saw Amphlett flinch. Even for Gervase's egalitarian ménage, this was a bit too much. No wonder the old butler had been unconvincing about Henry's giving satisfaction. Diana evidently felt the same. "Your servants, Gervase," she exclaimed, "seem to enjoy a perpetual Saturnalia."

"You mustn't be hard on Henry," said Anthea Camelot. "After all, he's spent most of the day standing at attention over a tray of ginger-beer bottles. If that isn't slavery, my name is Pharaoh."

I was sitting very near Gervase and got the feeling that the words he now murmured were for my ears alone. "Youth must have its tests, its ordeals," I heard.

Diana broke in, "Oh, dear, I've left my handkerchief indoors.

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Henry"—she was the kind of woman who gives orders to servants without bothering to look at them—"fetch the handkerchief from my dressing-table."

"My orders are to stay here, madam."

I was afraid there would be an explosion. Gervase evidently intended to give no help: he was glancing quizzically from Diana to the young footman. But Hector was already on his feet, moving toward the house, as though his wife's wish had been communicated to him before she uttered it.

"I'll fetch it," he said.

After tea, Gervase retired up his elm tree again. Hector and Diana set up a target on the lawn and tried to lure the rest of us into archery. But Anthea, well aware no doubt that this particular sport would set off her charms to less advantage than Diana's, indicated that she would not object to my walking her round the rose garden.

As we strolled off, in the wake of Amphlett and Henry who were bearing the tea things back to the house, we noticed Hector and Diana fastening upon a not-too-obviously-enthusiastic Mr. Prew and beginning to instruct him in the art of drawing a six-foot bow.

"The thin end of the wedge," remarked Anthea. "Start off the wee pacifist on a bow and arrow and he'll soon be romping round with a loaded tommy gun."

Gervase's rose garden is a charming enough place even when there are no roses out, with its neat grass walks, its fountains and statues, and the box-hedges yielding their fragrance to the sun. Anthea and I sat down on deck chairs, prepared to enjoy each other's company. At least, I was. But it soon became clear that she had brought me here for a purpose.

"You *are* a detective of sorts, aren't you?" she said.

"Of sorts. Why?"

Her eyes followed an early butterfly for a moment. "Oh, everything seems so queer here this time."

"Such as?"

"Well, little Prew wandering about like a lost soul, and Hector quarreling with him, and Diana nagging at Gervase about that new footman, and Gervase sitting up a tree ignoring us all."

And ignoring you in particular, I thought. I said, "It's odd, no doubt. But this always was an odd household."

"Gervase does treat young Henry in an extraordinary way, though, don't you think? Spoiling him half the time and tyrannizing

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over him the rest. He's hardly let him out of his sight this afternoon, for instance."

"Perhaps it's Henry who's guarding Gervase," I said idly.

"Guarding him!" Anthea gave me a look from her warm, dark eyes. "You'd not say that if— Listen, the other night I came down late to get a book out of the library and I heard Gervase telling somebody off in the study next door. He was shouting, 'You'll not get any more of my money! I've a better use for it now.' "

"That is interesting. You don't know who he was talking to?"

"No. But any fool could make a good guess. There's only one person in this household who fits the role of blackmailer."

"You're judging Henry on rather flimsy evidence. Why, it might have been Hector. Hasn't Hector been sponging on Gervase most of his life?"

Anthea rose impatiently. I had not taken her seriously enough. Or so she thought. We strolled back to the lawn, where the archers were still at it. Diana made a fine goddess, standing bright-haired with the bow at full stretch. Hector was near her, his hands in the pockets of his tweed jacket. Thomas Prew looked an uninspiring figure beside them.

Diana's arrow flew into the gold. Then she turned to us, her face flushed and excited.

"Now I'll shoot the golden arrow. We used to do it when we were children. Watch, everyone! Henry, you must watch, too!"

She made the footman come a little way out from the elm tree and join us on the lawn. Everyone must see her triumph.

She took an ordinary arrow from her quiver and fitted it to the bowstring. "It'll turn to gold in the sky," she said.

Her body bent gracefully back and she shot straight upward. The dark arrow soared, almost invisible in its speed. The sun had gone down behind the low hill to our west, but higher up its rays were still streaming laterally from over the hilltop, so that the arrow was suddenly caught in them, flashed golden, and pursued its course for a little, shining like a gold thread against the sky's deepening blue.

For us, it was a strangely fascinating sight, a moment of pure innocence. Like children, we all wanted to do it. But the lower the sun sank behind the hill, the higher we had to shoot.

After a quarter of an hour, only Hector and Diana could get an arrow up into the golden stream. Then Diana failed. Then Hector made a last effort. His arrow just turned gold before it began to

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wobble, slowly reversed, and streaked down toward the elms just behind us.

We heard it strike a branch and fall clattering from branch to branch. The sound of its falling grew and grew, was hideously amplified, as if in a nightmare the arrow had turned into a human body hurtling down.

A few seconds later, the body of Gervase Musbury crashed to the ground, only half a dozen yards from where we stood.

It seemed, for a moment, to put into words what we were all thinking, when Anthea Camelot cried out bitterly to Hector, who was standing there, the bow still in his hand, looking stupid and frightened, like a child who has broken some treasured ornament. "You've shot him!"

Diana said, in a brisk, motherly sort of voice, "Don't let's get hysterical. Of course Hector couldn't have shot him."

Thomas Prew was staring at the body, an expression of white horror on his face, his mouth moving soundlessly. It must have been some shock in childhood, some spectacle like this of blood and shattered bone, which created the pacifist in him.

Henry was kneeling beside the body, making as if to lift Gervase's head onto his lap. Then he said dully, "I think his neck's broken."

"I kept telling him that platform wasn't safe!" said Anthea, staring up into the treetops. The rooks, which had risen out of them in hundreds, cawing and crawking when the body fell, were beginning to return.

I stepped forward and put my hand on Henry's shoulder. I could feel it trembling. We gazed down at the wreck of Gervase. His face was a queer bluish-pink color. My heart missed a beat. This was too much: it was grotesque and impossible.

I bent and sniffed at his lips. Then I found, a few yards away on the grass, an object whose fall had been disregarded in the tragic moment—the shattered fragments of a ginger-beer bottle. I picked one of them up. The same scent of peach blossom clung to it as I had smelled on Gervase's lips.

I turned angrily to the cluster of people. "The arrow may have struck him," I said, "and his neck is certainly broken. But what killed him was poison—prussic acid—conveyed to him through that ginger-beer bottle."

An hour later we were all together again, sitting round the table in the dining room. The village constable had taken statements and

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was now on guard over the body. A superintendent, police surgeon, and the rest of it were on their way from the county town. In the meanwhile, I had made use of Gervase's keys and had the run of his study, where I had found out one or two interesting things.

I looked round the group at the table. Anthea was crying quietly. Thomas Prew's face remained white, dazed, incredulous. Hector, for some reason, was still holding an arrow and the bow as though they had frozen to his fingers. Only Diana appeared relatively normal.

"I thought we might clear up a few things before the Westchester police come," I said. "Suicide seems to be out of the question. Gervase had no motive for it, he wasn't that kind of person, and there's no farewell message. So I'm afraid he was murdered."

The four of them stirred, almost as if in relief at knowing the worst. "Somehow the poison was introduced into that bottle," I continued flatly. "Gervase hauled it up, drank it in the ginger-beer—prussic acid works very quickly—and was overcome just at the moment when Hector happened to send up his last arrow, and toppled off the platform."

"But how could the poison—?" began Anthea.

"I've been talking to Amphlett. The ginger-beer is kept in the cellar. Only he and Gervase had keys to the cellar. Gervase's key was on the ring in his pocket. So it's unlikely that anyone but he or Amphlett could have tampered with one of the bottles while they were still in the cellar. Amphlett opened the cellar after lunch, gave half a dozen bottles to Henry, who carried them out on a tray, and locked the cellar door again immediately."

"But Henry was out there beside the tray the whole afternoon," said Mr. Prew.

"Yes. The odd thing is that he admits it. Almost like a sentry on guard, swearing he never left his post. He swears no one could have got at the bottles, except during the couple of minutes after tea when he and Amphlett were carrying the tea things back to the house."

"Well," said Anthea, "you and I were walking over to the rose garden just then, so we can give each other alibis."

"I suppose Mr. Prew, Hector, and I can do the same," said Diana in a tone of some distaste, as though giving people an alibi was a vulgar and disgusting thing, like giving them ringworm.

"In that case, no one but Henry or Amphlett could have put the poison into the bottle," said Mr. Prew.

"So it would seem. Logically."

"But Amphlett was devoted to Gervase," said Hector after a pause.

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"And Henry wouldn't do it. I mean, he wouldn't murder his own father, would he?"

Anthea gave a gasp of astonishment. It was no surprise to me. I had found a will in Gervase's desk, leaving the bulk of his fortune to Henry Borthwick. There could be little doubt that Henry was Gervase's long-lost child by the love of his youth, Rose Borthwick.

The relationship explained his peculiar treatment of the young man. I remembered him murmuring to me, "Youth must have its tests, its ordeals." There was always method in Gervase's eccentricity. It was quite in character for him to have tested the young man, like the hero in a fairy tale, given him a period of probation, imposing on him the menial duties of a servant.

"So it *was* Henry who was trying to blackmail Gervase!" exclaimed Anthea. She told the others what she had heard that night in the library.

"But why," I asked, "should he blackmail Gervase when Gervase had left him most of his fortune in a will?"

"Is this true?" demanded Diana.

I nodded.

Hector said, "The question about blackmail doesn't seem important now. The point is, Henry *had* a motive for killing Gervase. If he knew that Gervase had made a will in his favor, that is."

"We'd better ask him." Before anyone had time to object, I sent Amphlett to fetch Henry. When the young man came in, I asked him, "Did you know Gervase was your father and was leaving you his fortune?"

"Oh, yes," said Henry, gazing defiantly at us all. "But if you think I murdered him, you're—"

"What else can you expect us to think?"

"I expect you to credit me with some brains. If I'd wanted to kill my father, d'you suppose I'd be fool enough to do it by putting poison in a bottle which points to me as the most likely suspect?"

"There's something in what he says," remarked Mr. Prew. "But who else could have a motive for—"

"There's yourself for one," I interrupted. "You're a militant pacifist. You heard that Gervase was on the way to perfecting a new explosive. Maybe you wanted to spare humanity the horror of it."

"Oh, but that's fantastic!"

"Then there's Diana and Hector. Diana is an ambitious woman, with a not very rich husband and a very rich brother-in-law. Dispose of the latter, and she'd have the means to gratify all her ambi-

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tions—at least, she would as soon as Hector's father dies, and he's a very old man now."

"I think perhaps you had better leave these matters to the police," began Diana icily.

I paid no attention to her. "What Anthea heard in the library that night is significant. It fits the theory that it was Hector, not Henry, who was demanding money from Gervase. Gervase said, 'You'll not get any more of my money! I've a better use for it now.' A better use for it *now,* because he had found his son, Henry. No doubt Hector then asked him what he meant by the last phrase, and was told that Gervase proposed to leave his money to his son."

"In that case, Nigel, you silly ass, what would be the point of my killing Gervase?" Hector was blushing, yet triumphant, like a boy making a decisive point in a school debate.

"None. Unless you did it in such a way as to incriminate Henry. He would be hanged for your crime, and Gervase's fortune in due course would pass to you. And, I must say, if Henry didn't commit the murder, someone took great pains to make it look as if he did. Why—"

We all started as Anthea burst out hysterically, "Oh, for God's sake, stop this! I loved Gervase. Why not say I did it, because—because he wouldn't look at me? Hell hath no fury—"

"Be quiet, Anthea!" I commanded. "I'm not finished with Hector and Diana yet. You see, two rather peculiar things happened which the police may well ask them to explain."

"Well?" asked Diana indifferently, but I could see her curiosity was aroused.

"It was peculiar that you two, who—Gervase told me—were hardly on speaking terms with Mr. Prew, should suddenly become so chummy with him after tea and insist on showing him how to shoot with the bow. But not peculiar if you wanted him to give you an alibi for just then—the only few minutes in the afternoon when Henry wasn't standing by the ginger-beer bottles. Not peculiar if it was absolutely vital for both of you to be able to prove you didn't go near them."

"But, my dear good Nigel, you've admitted, only a few minutes ago, that no one but Henry or Amphlett could have tampered with that bottle. Why pick on us?" said Hector.

"I said that logically it seemed so. But Diana did another funny thing. She became matey also with Henry—Henry, whom she'd been treating like dirt up to that point."

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Mr. Prew and Anthea had grown tense. They were staring at me as if I was the Apocalypse.

"Yes," I went on, "when she was getting ready to shoot the golden arrow for the first time, Diana called out to Henry to come and watch. Terribly out of character that was, Diana. But suppose you had to get him away from under the elm trees, get him looking up in the sky like the rest of us, following the course of your arrow, for the seven or eight seconds Hector would need to move the few yards to that silver tray under the elms and substitute a poisoned bottle of ginger-beer for the one that stood there? Hector," I went on quickly, "where's that handkerchief you fetched for Diana during tea? You never gave it to her, did you?"

Hector was angry now, but he gave me a queer smile of triumph, reached in the poacher's pocket of his tweed coat, and took a handkerchief out of it.

"I see what you're driving at, old boy. The idea is that I really went indoors to fetch a bottle of poisoned ginger-beer? Well, I didn't. I just brought the handkerchief. So now," he advanced on me menacingly, "you'll kindly apologize to my wife for—"

I snatched the handkerchief from him and put it cautiously to my nose.

"As I thought. Since when did you start using a perfume of peach blossom, Diana?" I was round the other side of the table from them now. "You fetched both the handkerchief *and* the poisoned bottle, Hector. In that nice big poacher's pocket. The handkerchief was needed to keep your fingerprints off the bottle, no doubt. It was unlucky for you that some of the poisoned ginger-beer leaked out onto it."

Hector and Diana were certainly a good team. I had hardly finished speaking when they were at the door, Hector threatening us with the arrow he had notched on his bowstring.

"If any of you calls out, he gets this arrow in him. Diana, fetch the car."

Diana was out of the door like a flash. Prew, Anthea, and old Amphlett were staring at Hector, dazed out of all movement. I felt like one of the suitors in the banqueting hall when Odysseus turned his great bow on them. Then I heard a scurry of movement behind me.

Henry had snatched up one of the huge, heavy silver dish-covers from the sideboard and, shielding his face and breast with it, was running headlong at Hector. The bow twanged deeply. The arrow

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clanged against the edge of the dish-cover, ricocheted off, and stuck quivering in the far wall.

Henry's charge brought Hector down. He half killed Hector before we could pull him off. He would have been a good son to Gervase if Gervase had lived.

I had loved Gervase, too. If I hadn't, I don't think I should have played that trick on Hector.

The perfume on the handkerchief I snatched from him was not peach blossom, not the lethal fragrance of prussic acid at all. The handkerchief smelled of nothing more dangerous than fresh linen, though he *had* used it to hold the poisoned bottle.

Yes, it was a very long shot on my part—as long a shot, in its way, as that last one of Hector's which had just caught the golden gleam and then fallen into the treetops where Gervase died.

DETECTIVERSE

TRUTH WILL OUT

by NANCY GOTTER GATES

She thought he was safely entombed
Till the cops had the body exhumed—
His demise, it was true,
Came from poison, not flu—
It was then that she knew she was doomed.

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a *NEW* short story by

BILL MOODY

When they called, Weston made a game of putting faces to the voices. There were a lot of regulars, and some, like Weston, were knowledgeable jazz fans. The lonely ones just wanted to talk. Weston could always tell which ones knew the music.

Bill Moody hosts a twice-weekly radio show called Jazz Traditions *on KUNV-FM in Las Vegas and has written a number of articles on jazz for local and national publications. He is working on a detective novel . . .*

JAZZLINE

by BILL MOODY

"This is WJAM, your jazz spot for the valley, 105.1 on your FM dial. I'm Tim Weston and it's time for 'Round Midnight.' "

Weston turned up the volume on the Duke Ellington record spinning on turntable one, waited a few seconds, then faded the music and continued with his lead-in announcements. "I'll be with you till three this morning with some of the best in modern jazz, so relax, get comfortable and in the groove. If there's anything special you'd like to hear, remember, we do take requests. Just give the jazzline a call at 729-2929 and I'll do my best to find it for you, right here on WJAM."

Weston returned the gain to normal levels and clicked off the air mike. He removed the headphones and began searching through a stack of new compact discs for the latest Stan Getz, glancing at the phone as he did.

When was she going to call again? he wondered.

There were four lines into the studio but no more than one at a

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time ever lit up on Weston's shift. None of the lights glowed at the moment.

He cued up two records and filled in the needle drop sheet, the listing of the artist and cut he would play next. First break was at twelve-twenty, so he had time to pull the Public Service announcements and ready the commercial cartridges.

He stretched, leaned back in the swivel chair, laced his hands behind his neck, and listened to Stan Getz glide through the changes of "Stella by Starlight." He faced the control board of slide dials, mike switches, and a large clock. To his left were two turntables; to the right, stacked on top of each other, two compact-disc players and the tape-cartridge machines. He always felt curiously cut off from the outside world on these late shifts, like the pilot of a space capsule. The only link to the outside was the phone. He tried to imagine the callers, the listeners to his show. After six months, he had a substantial following of night owls, insomniacs, musicians, and jazz buffs. He pictured them crashed on their couches, lying in bed, pacing off the early-morning hours, or driving around town.

When they called, he made a game of putting faces to the voices. There were a lot of regulars, and some, like Weston, were knowledgeable jazz fans. The lonely ones just wanted to talk. Weston could always tell which ones knew the music.

But her voice. She was the one he thought about most, the easiest to imagine, to put a face and a body to, even if he still didn't know her name. Weston caught the phone light winking at him.

"Jazzline."

"Hi, lover, you're cooking tonight." She'd called several times in the past few weeks, then the calls had mysteriously stopped. Weston had gone crazy wondering if she'd call again, wondering what she looked like and if he'd ever meet her.

"Where you been?" he said. He eyed the timer on the CD player. Still a minute and forty-seven seconds left before the next break.

"I've been working up nerve to call you again and tell you—what I really want." Her voice had a smoky, throaty sound that reminded Weston of Julie London.

He gripped the phone tighter and smiled. "Tell me."

"I want us to meet. At my place," she said, her voice quieter. "Tonight."

"Hey, baby, I'd like nothing better, but you know I'm here till three?"

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"I know that. I mean after. After you get off you could come over here."

"Where is here?" Only thirty-eight seconds until the break. "Can you hold while I do some business?"

"Well, I guess." Weston stabbed the Hold button on the phone, put it down, flipped on the headphones, and pulled the mike into position as the CD finished.

"Stan Getz and the quartet on WJAM, your jazz station for the valley," he said. "We'll be back with some more music in a moment but first these important announcements." He pressed the button for the tape cartridge, a 33-second Safe Sex message, and grabbed the phone.

"Hey, I don't even know your name."

She was gone. He listened to the dial tone, then slammed down the phone as the spot finished. He read two more PSAs, then played one of the records he had cued up for the next segment of the show. He clicked on the mike, then read off the album cover of his next selection.

"All right, you piano lovers, next up we've got some early Oscar Peterson and his trio, live at the London House in Chicago." With the word Chicago, he pressed the Remote button for the turntable and Oscar's piano simultaneously filled the headphones and the airwaves. He turned down the mike volume, flipped the cutoff switch, and glanced at the clock facing him. This track ran nine minutes. Why couldn't she call now?

Seconds later the phone light winked at him. He lunged for the phone.

"Jazzline."

"Weston, why don't you quit playing this nigger music?" Tim recognized this voice, too, a regular, at first annoying and now impossible caller who'd bugged him for weeks. First it wasn't enough big bands, then it wasn't enough standard tunes or enough ballads—and now this.

"Stan Getz is a white artist," Weston tried. "I just played him. Jazz is black music, you know."

"Don't lecture me, Weston. I've forgotten more about jazz than you'll ever know." The man began coughing so hard he was unable to continue.

"Why don't you know enough to give up those cigarettes?" Weston said. "And while you're at it, my show, too." He slammed down the phone.

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Station policy or not, this guy was a creep and Weston didn't mean to listen to him any more. He cued up the next record, a selection of the Woody Herman band, and waited.

Two minutes into "Four Brothers," the phone lit up again.

"Jazzline."

"I'm sorry I hung up, but I couldn't talk. My husband came in but he's gone now."

"Husband?" I knew there had to be something wrong, Weston thought.

"Yeah, he's usually not up at this time. I listen to you alone, with earphones. It's like you, your voice, is in my head."

Weston considered. Sexy voice, interested, but married. Problems, complications. Probably wasn't going anywhere. "So you were going to tell me your name, where you lived."

"Madeleine," she said quickly. "I can't talk now, he's coming back." Before Weston could protest, she'd hung up again.

He looked at the phone, shook his head, and hung up. A kook? He put on two long tracks and busied himself with the other late-night duties. Cataloguing some of the discs, logging in level readings and the FCC report for operator on duty.

By two o'clock, he was caught up and had all the music lined up for the rest of the show.

"Tim Weston with you for one more hour on WJAM. We're going to keep it slow and dreamy this last hour, with some solo piano, some Miles, and a ballad from Carmen McRae. First, though, this message." He pushed the Cartridge button for another PSA and cued up George Shearing.

"All right, here we go till three." Miles Davis's mournful trumpet filled his headphones. He potted down the mike and clicked off just as the phone light winked.

"Jazzline."

"Sorry I couldn't talk before. He came back, forgot something." She sounded out of breath.

"It's okay." He paused. "Are we really going to meet or—"

"Yes, yes. You don't know how much the music you play means to me. It's like—I don't know, like—" Her voice trailed off huskily. Weston could fill in the blanks, imagine her lying on the couch in a negligee, eyes closed, sipping white wine.

"So what kind of schedule is your husband on?"

"He's—we're not really married, we just live together, but I don't—"

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Weston eyed the CD player. There was a minute fourteen to go before another break. "Look, if you want, I could come by in the afternoon. Or we could meet somewhere else."

"No, it has to be tonight."

"Okay, but where?" He listened and copied down the address and watched the seconds tick away. She hung up almost simultaneously with the record's end. He cued up the next record and noticed the phone light glowing again. Maybe she'd forgotten something.

"Jazzline."

"Christ, Weston, don't you have any big bands down there? No Benny Goodman, no Woody Herman? Or how about some Stan Kenton?"

Weston sighed. "Look, I don't know what you want," he said, "but if you're so unhappy, why don't you just change the station or watch TV or something?"

" 'Cause I like bugging you, Weston." The caller was seized by another spasm of coughing and hung up.

At two-fifty, Tim made his final break and buzzed in the relief DJ. What a night.

The Cove Apartments was a huge complex. It took him several minutes of long walks, wrong turns, and dead ends before he finally found 1151. He'd almost given up. Was this just a little bit crazy or what? Was he really going to do this? He had to be crazy. Well, but I might as well see what she looks like, he thought.

There was one light on that he could see as he rang the bell. The door opened just a crack. It was dark inside. "Tim? Come in."

It was her, all right. There was no mistaking that voice. Weston went in and closed the door behind him. Then he heard someone cough.

"Yeah, come in, Weston," the other voice said. He recognized that one, too.

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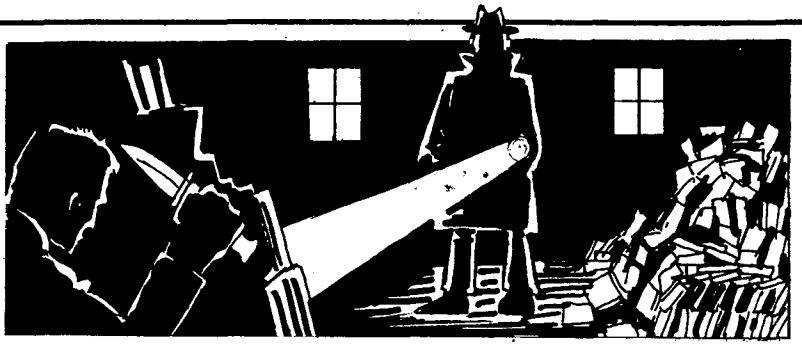

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ELLERY QUEEN CONTEST FIRST-PRIZE WINNER—1948

The year 1947 saw the height of the post-war Italian movies. We think this story reflects that. Here is part of what Ellery Queen had to say about the story when it first appeared, in the April 1948 issue of EQMM:

"The detective in 'Justice Has No Number' is one of the little men of the world—one of the forgotten men, the men of deepest good will, the blessed men whose atomic meekness shall someday inherit the earth. Bastia is a simple but natively shrewd organ grinder in Italy who has an even smaller being as his colleague—Pasqualino, a kind of Watson brand-new to detective fiction. Pasqualino knows only one word of speech—but it is the almighty word, the right word.

"You will find in Bastia, the unassuming little hurdy-gurdy man, qualities rarely encountered in contemporary detectives in these hard, loose, cynical days—warmth, kindness, understanding, and, most of all, a passion for justice and a compassion for his fellow men . . ."

JUSTICE HAS NO NUMBER

by ALFREDO SEGRE

Bastia scrambled back up the embankment and pulled his hurdy-gurdy off the road, setting one wheel firmly in the ditch. Then, carefully carrying the cage in which Pasqualino was napping, he started down the slope once again, toward the bushes where he had first seen the blackberries shining in the sun. There, behind the bushes, he had found the body of a man. The sight would have been a shocking one had it not been for the war which was still going on up North and which had accustomed him to seeing bodies scattered around everywhere.

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He squatted down on the grass and emptied his pockets of all the berries he had picked. Pasqualino began to groan because the sun hit him right in the eyes, but Bastia paid no attention. He had even forgotten to be hungry, staring at the body, not frightened, but somehow fascinated, as if he had been called to share a secret, with some strange force guiding his steps down the embankment and then around the bushes. The fact that the man was dead, and that he was an utter stranger, sharpened his curiosity. Finally he said to himself: I will call him Luigi. Then he felt more at ease and swallowed a handful of berries.

That Luigi was young, of that there was no doubt—his calves were strong and full. That he had been dead only for a short time was equally clear—there was no stench, just the faint odor of a butcher shop early in the morning. But more than that was hard to know, and yet he should know, because there was a reason for everything; the berries had shone in the sun and he had been hungry just so that he could meet Luigi sprawled behind the bushes before the police could intrude on his secret. The police!

He hated the police, the guards, and the carabinieri. Time and again they had made him sleep in jail, the hurdy-gurdy rusting in the rain, just to question him about things that had happened along the road. Let the police beat out their brains trying to find out who the man was: the body had no head.

"They will go and dig in some faraway cemetery," Bastia said, turning to Pasqualino.

"Why?" Pasqualino asked, lifting one claw and swaying a little.

"Because the police must have a head, any head, to show they know everything."

"Why?" repeated Pasqualino; and he spread his toes wide on the perch and then cramped them together like the leaves of an artichoke, still swaying with that air of nonchalant understanding which Bastia loved like a subtle tickling.

"Because the commissario is a lawyer."

"Why?" Pasqualino went on, shifting onto the other leg.

"It's difficult to explain," said Bastia, trying to think of the answer. But Pasqualino got excited and asked why five or six times in succession.

"Because you are a parrot! Shut up!" And Bastia shook the cage until Pasqualino lost his grip and retreated between the water cup and the box where the fortune cards were stacked.

Bastia moved nearer to the body. A parade of faces kept bouncing

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up; some of them fitted nicely onto the strong neck, others were too small and stood up funny, like the hook on a hanger. Whom did he know who had such broad shoulders? He cast a glance at the distant hills where the towns struggled to stand upright. He mumbled their names, and at each name he sorted out two, three, even five dubious characters whose shoulders were broad.

To thin the confusion, he began anew, starting with the town of Monticello, the nearest one. There lived Stefo, a thief, and Vincenzo, who prowled around the houses from which the men had been shipped to Germany. Suppose Stefo had been caught at night stealing a few rabbits, or a husband had come back all of a sudden and bumped into Vincenzo creeping into the bedroom.

Bastia stared again at the headless body and shrugged: to cut off a man's head meant that the murderer must have hated him for a long time, and both Stefo and Vincenzo were such petty offenders that the people of Monticello accepted them with tolerance, especially now that things all around were so much worse. And besides, Stefo and Vincenzo had never worn boots.

Bastia's eyes slid along the hills and stopped at the whitish spot of Castelnuovo. First he thought of Don Marco, the land-owner and Mayor, who lived in a big house, half farm and half villa, and who once had told him to find a job that would be more decent than grinding a hurdy-gurdy. The thought of the Mayor brought back the thought of the police. It would be better to keep going, because if the patrol caught him here, the first thing they'd do would be to shove him into the rotten dampness of a cell and call him a suspect.

Still he hesitated: this Luigi was so helpless without a head that he felt an impulse of friendship. So he said aloud, "I'd like to take care of you, believe me, Luigi," and he wished he had a piece of gauze to lay over his neck, like on a slice of watermelon, to keep the flies away—those green flies which cluster wherever there is something open and about to spoil. He looked at the boots, and then at his own feet. "I'll let you keep them," he said, shoving a handful of berries into his mouth, "because you are my friend. Now we must go," he added, turning to Pasqualino.

Bastia gave a last look at the body. Suddenly he grabbed the cage and whispered to the parrot, "You see, the grass is green, green and clean."

"Why?" asked Pasqualino.

"That's the point," Bastia answered, starting slowly up the embankment . . .

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At the approaches to Monticello, he almost decided to skirt the town and go right on to the next one, four miles away. Monticello was too near to the body, Monticello had a carabinieri station, and behind his back he could sense a net being dragged over the road and beyond the road, catching stones, posts, berries, and the headless body, and finally his hurdy-gurdy, and dumping everything into jail.

But this was Friday. On Fridays he always visited Monticello; the townsfolk waited for him so they could buy the fortune cards and play the numbers at the weekly lottery. He could easily make fifty lire and eat a decent meal. With the meal he thought of a bottle of wine, and he pulled hard along the uphill street which led into Monticello's main square.

He stopped by the fountain, filled Pasqualino's cup, and showed him a handful of dried chestnuts, which was Pasqualino's pay for picking out a card and offering it to the customer. By the shadow of the lamppost he reckoned it was almost eight o'clock. A few minutes later, the bells began to call for the second Mass. He wound up the hurdy-gurdy and turned the pointer to a mazurka, glancing at the wine shop, which was still closed, and then at the black hole of the post office, which accepted lottery numbers and gave receipts for them.

On the point of letting the music pour out, he reminded himself that it would irk the priest. The priest was the ecclesiastic authority. Every town had authorities who were only too glad to shout abuse at a man with a hurdy-gurdy. Once Bastia had dreamed of putting all the authorities together and letting them starve because there would be no peasants to grow food for them. And he would then play a mazurka for them.

After half an hour he grew impatient. His feet were burning and wine could make the heat even all over. He counted his money again. In his pocket he mashed a couple of berries, and his mind went back to the murdered man and his eyes looked for the carabinieri station. Suddenly he realized that except for the killer he was the only one who knew about the crime.

"I have been chosen," he said to Pasqualino in a whisper.

"Why?"

"Because I'm the only one who's going to play the right numbers of the cabala."

Besides selling cards with personal advice and lucky numbers printed on them, Bastia kept the cabala for the use of his customers. The cabala was a book which had on its cover the picture of a blind-

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folded girl stretched out on a golden quilt. Everything that existed, everything that could possibly happen or that could be dreamt of in the world, was listed there with its number. But since the numbers of the weekly lottery were only the first ninety, and since the things, the facts, and the dreams in the world were many more, each number in the cabala had several meanings. Bastia had studied them for years until he had memorized them all, and often he would impress the townsfolk by saying, "Remember that the harvest, the coffin, the skylark, and the pregnant woman have the same number," and then he would take the book and show that he never made a mistake.

He closed his eyes to conceal the numbers popping about inside his head. Eighty-four, which corresponded to *Man Beheaded,* appeared in a luminous halo. He was a little bit upset: that halo smelled of religion, and no saints had ever protected him. But then, Luigi wasn't a martyr; he had lost his head in some unsaintly way. Finally he solved it by accepting Luigi as his personal friend, and the halo around 84 took on a special meaning. That was a sure number.

Still, he had to guess the other two, because guessing three numbers correctly out of the five which were drawn every Saturday in the lottery at Rome meant winning three thousand five hundred times the stake. Suppose I sell fifty lire's worth of fortune cards, I'll go and play the whole amount. Three thousand five hundred times fifty is— No figures came into his mind. He only saw a bed, and under the bed a jug of wine. Eighty-four is a sure number. Christ was crucified for all men, Luigi was beheaded for me alone. I must find the other two numbers, and there is a lot to work out, starting with the berries, and the day which is Friday, and the crime without blood.

He kept studying the numbers and the circumstances and the constellation of the month of May, and the association of the Moon with Uranus, which always brought unforeseeable events. And in the meantime he pulled his hurdy-gurdy to the front of the church, watching the two doors that opened softly and let people out without any warning. At about nine o'clock five or six women came out, folded their black kerchiefs, and gathered around the hurdy-gurdy.

"I had a dream," one of them said. "Will you explain it to me?"

"Tell the beast to pick a lucky card for me," said another, holding out a two-lire bill.

"He's not a beast," Bastia grunted, and he showed Pasqualino the chestnuts. Pasqualino quickly thrust his beak among the leaflets.

"This advice is for a young girl," the woman complained.

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"Pasqualino thinks you are young—parrots are used to living three hundred years," Bastia replied, grabbing the two-lire bill.

"In my dream I saw two baskets full of eggs."

The church door opened noiselessly and a man slid out. Bastia caught his quick turn to the left of the stairs and noted that he walked awkwardly.

"Was he at confession?" he asked one of the women. At that moment the man turned into a narrow street. "Do me a favor, watch my stuff, I'll be back in a minute," Bastia said hurriedly, "and don't fool around with Pasqualino, he pecks hard. Two baskets full of eggs is two for the baskets, twenty-one for eggs, and thirty-three for hunger."

He ran through the square and walked into the narrow street. The man was fifty yards ahead of him. On his way to Monticello, the man had certainly cut across the fields, because there were briars stuck to the cuffs of his trousers. Bastia quickened his pace. He must have gone to pick blackberries just after I did, he said to himself, then he went to confession.

He was on the point of calling to the man, but instead, a few yards away, he walked on tiptoe and suddenly caught up to him, slightly grazing his elbow. The man jerked, but Bastia continued to stare at the ground, keeping just abreast of him, swaying toward the ditch when the man swayed and measuring every step to his step. In a few seconds, the man began to pant and then to cough. Bastia didn't raise his head, but all at once he stepped hard on the man's foot, and with the weight of his body shoved him against a mound of gravel. There the man sat down and with trembling hands took off his boots—then he stood up, jumped into the ditch, climbed over the other side of it, and started to run across the fields.

Bastia took off his jacket, picked up the boots and wrapped them in it, and, with the bundle under his arm, walked back to town.

When the women finally left with their dreams and their cards, Bastia gave Pasqualino his chestnuts and said angrily, "Men are cowards and imbeciles."

But Pasqualino didn't ask why, because he was busily using his beak and claws to peel his fruits, and Bastia felt disappointed. Pasqualino was his only partner, the only one who was always interested in hearing his opinions. That Pasqualino questioned him with unending whys was not an accident. Bastia had experienced the whys set forth by the police and had found out that every answer to them

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almost always turned out somehow to be a confession of guilt. Therefore he had learned to keep his mouth shut with the police and had taught the parrot the word—the almighty word.

"Men are cowards and imbeciles," Bastia repeated when the last chestnut was swallowed. This time Pasqualino asked a soft why, and Bastia smiled. "Because they would steal a pair of boots from a living man who needed them and be proud of it; but when they steal them from a dead man who doesn't give a damn, then they are scared. And now let's go and get a glass of wine."

He pushed the hurdy-gurdy to the wine shop, went inside, and sat down.

The owner hastened to inform him that the price of a glass of wine was ten lire. "Everything is getting expensive," the owner commented, wiping the glass and setting it down on the table.

Bastia put a five-lire bill and a fortune card on the tray, and quickly gulped the wine.

"At least you could give out good numbers," grumbled the owner. "You remember when the airplanes dropped those bombs?"

"I remember: fourteen bombs, six airplanes, seventeen dead, and Salvatore's dog jumping on three legs."

"You gave out the wrong numbers—they never came out."

"I told the people that nothing right can come out of a war. Good numbers want justice."

"You know," said the owner of the wine shop, "no one understands you?"

Bastia pressed his hands to his forehead, to squeeze out the two other numbers which, with 84, would give him three thousand five hundred times fifty lire. It was hard to choose, his brain was getting numb. For example, take 35—*blackberries*. It was true that the blackberries had led him to the discovery of the beheaded body, but still, should more value be attributed to the things *around* a crime or to the things *inside* a crime? And which were the things inside the crime?

Take another example: *death without blood* was 49 in the cabala, but who knew the number for a bloodless wound? The grass was green—not a drop had fallen from the big gash in Luigi's neck.

Bastia's face became all wrinkled: from somewhere a thought had crept under his forehead and, reaching his eyes, had changed swiftly into an image: a hog hanging by the feet from the wall of a slaughterhouse. There was no doubt: in no other way could Luigi's body

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have been emptied of blood. This was butchering. And the number for *butchering* was 14.

"You're always talking to yourself," the owner said from behind the counter. "Do you understand yourself?"

But Bastia had already left. He was pulling the hurdy-gurdy across the square, watching the open windows of the carabinieri station. Everything was quiet. The wife of the brigadiere was setting the table on the second floor; in the courtyard there were bicycles chained to the gate. All this meant that the news of the crime had not yet reached Monticello.

Inside the post office, where they took the numbers and gave receipts for the weekly lottery, Bastia leaned against the wall. He was unhappy. He knew that all things in the world are numbers, but he knew also that numbers have rules like the stars, that they group together because of certain attractions which were hard to detect. He touched the bills wadded up in his pocket. Eighty-four and 14. He didn't believe in them—they were easy. They might be good enough for the townsfolk who could only grasp the appearances of fact. No, he should wait, 84 and 14 lacked the link between them, the third number—the reason for the crime.

As he turned toward the door, a man with a grey hat walked straight over to the counter and said something to the clerk. Bastia noticed that his accent was thick—he must be one of the Southerners who had fled when Sicily was first invaded. He lingered on the threshold and waited curiously to hear his words. But instead he heard the post-office clerk ask, "Did you say eighty-four and fourteen?"

"And seventy-two," said the man, leaning over the counter.

Bastia pushed his hurdy-gurdy off the road till one wheel sat firmly in the ditch, locked the drawer into which he had stuffed Luigi's boots, and, taking the parrot, he started down the slope.

The women were lined up on one side, the men opposite them, all of them behind the Mayor, the brigadiere, and the carabinieri. In the middle was Luigi's body. The odor was stronger—the flesh had begun to cook.

Bastia crouched on the ground, in back of the black skirts, and screened Pasqualino's cage with the front of his jacket. He had the clear feeling that the world of stars and numbers was present in the order with which everything around him had grouped together. The people were silent. They seemed to be one with the murdered man,

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maybe because he was pitiful, maybe because they thought he had been a good fellow. This was one group, a universe eclipsed by pity.

Then there was a second group, and it was like two planets circling around Luigi's body. The first planet was the man who had stolen Luigi's boots. Its light was pale, made of tremors of fear. The second planet was the man who had played 84, 14, and 72. It gave no light.

"Can you explain to me why this body happens to be on your property?" the brigadiere asked the man who had stolen the boots. There was no answer. The Mayor whispered into the ear of the brigadiere, two carabinieri stepped to his side, then they sandwiched the man in between them and all three walked toward the town.

The authorities formed the third group. They were rings around a crime.

"We should have an ambulance to take it to the cemetery," the Mayor remarked.

"First I'd like a picture taken," the brigadiere said pointedly.

"No one would recognize him, anyway," Don Marco, the Mayor, replied after a moment of reflection.

"But in Rome there is an office called the Anthropometric Police," the brigadiere said resentfully. Everyone looked at him with respect, and Don Marco's eyes became sulky.

"In Rome they do nothing!" he grumbled.

While the crowd was distracted by the quarrel of the authorities, Bastia crept along stealthily until he reached an opening between the first and second row of women. From there he had an unobstructed view of the face of the man with the grey hat. Why did he play 72? In the cabala, 72 meant *bride, travel by coach, flying without wings,* and *being pursued by a horse.* Why on earth had he played 72?

Green flies were clustered in bunches on Luigi's neck. One, big as a beetle, kept chasing away the others, flying low and bumping them, to clear the spot over which it wanted to land. A peasant came bringing a blanket. At a gesture of the Mayor he laid it down on the body, lingering to feel the material as if he were going to buy it.

"Don't worry, you'll get it back," the Mayor told the peasant.

"Don't take it back, you'll never be able to sleep," someone warned.

"This winter you'll die of pneumonia," Bastia remarked, pulling him by the sleeve and winking.

The flies had flown away, but the big one came back, walked over the blanket, testing it here and there, and found a hole. Bastia followed it intently. All of a sudden the fly buzzed away and then

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Bastia saw it swoop down on the man with the grey hat. Green flies love rottenness, he thought. The fly climbed along the jacket, reached the shoulder, then turned back and disappeared into a fold at the elbow.

Now Bastia's vision was shut off by a pair of legs accompanied by a scabbard. He crawled back, went all around the bushes to avoid being noticed by the authorities, and stopped next to the man with the grey hat. He looked at his shoes. They were nasty shoes, almost yellow. He touched the man lightly, as if he wanted to speak to him, but at that moment the crowd broke up to let two men pass through with a stretcher. The women crossed themselves.

The man with the grey hat shuffled back, treading on Bastia's foot. Bastia looked up at his face. There was a twitch running over his lips, like ripples over the skin of a horse. The man had hooked his thumbs under the armpits of his vest. His hands lay flat on his breast, showing thick nails bordered with dark strips. The big green fly had landed on the middle finger and was seesawing on the nail, alternately bending forward to taste it and then rocking back to rub its feet together, because, caked under the nail, was dried blood.

When the carabinieri lifted the blanket to place the body on the stretcher, even the Mayor stopped giving orders. Bastia felt sorry for those sturdy shoulders which ended in nothing. He put the cage on the ground and took off his hat.

Then the stretcher was carried away, and the entire crowd followed it down the road. The man with the grey hat walked alone toward the hills. "Who's that fellow?" Bastia asked a woman, starting to pull his hurdy-gurdy.

"They say he's opened a butcher shop somewhere in the valley. He's a butcher, that much I know."

Bastia scratched his ear. Were things getting silly or were they getting straight?

Saturday came, and then Sunday and Monday. On Monday night, in the main square of Monticello, the people were gathered in front of the post office. Soon the numbers for this week's lottery would be pasted in the window. And there was much impatience—every player had had to wait three long days to know his luck now that the telephone line had been torn down by the spring offensive, and the numbers had to come from Rome on the bus, which ran only twice a week.

In the center of the square, near the fountain, Bastia was sitting

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on the handle of his hurdy-gurdy, swinging Pasqualino's cage from left to right. From time to time he would answer the questions of the women, or listen to their chattering. But his mind was pursuing intricate combinations of thoughts, and several times his eyes looked high over the church belfry where Cassiopeia would shine soon, with her five stars seeming to form a cardinal's hat.

"Linda's daughter saw the head on top of a tree," a woman said. "She ran home and her mother took her to church."

"Did they find the head?" asked Bastia, startled.

"No. When the police arrived, it had disappeared."

"It was her sick stomach," the owner of the wine shop intervened. "The pharmacist explained it, he is a learned man. You see, he said that children have the special power of indigestion."

"You mean suggestion," Bastia said.

"What?"

The owner of the wine shop turned to the women, who were listening intently, and waved his hand in a gesture of pity and contempt.

"What numbers did you get out of the murder?" the owner asked, lifting his chin challengingly.

"The numbers, the numbers!" someone called out. The crowd rushed over to the post office. Only Bastia remained seated, but he strained his eyes to see, and repeated to himself: 84, 14, 72. The sun struck just above the window and made it difficult to peer through the deep shadow below. Bastia unhooked Pasqualino's cage and walked, head down, toward the post office. When he reached the window, he raised his head with a jerk.

None of the easy numbers had been drawn.

"You are no good," a voice said behind his back. It was the woman who had dreamed of two baskets of eggs.

"And your fortune cards are fakes," another added.

The wine-shop owner blocked his way. The people closed in. "Listen," he said, "you paid half price for my wine and gave me good numbers. Good numbers—bah! Give me my five lire, you cheat!"

"You always bring bad luck," commented an old man. "The day you were here, the planes came and my house was bombed out."

Bastia grabbed the handles of the hurdy-gurdy, slung the strap across his shoulder, and started down the hill that led out of town. On the main road he gathered his strength and pushed on toward a village three miles away. The shadow was climbing swiftly to the

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hilltops. One by one, the farmhouses, left behind by the sun, sprang white upon the earth. Bastia kept looking at the fugitive light. Always, as night found him on the road, the image of a jug of wine under a bed with a mattress would become so haunting as to lose all sense of reality.

Once, when it was harvest time, he was so thirsty and tired that he had seen in the contours of jug and bed a new constellation, on the left side of Orion. But now he was not thinking of wine and rest. After a while, he slowed down and came to a stop. There was the embankment and the blackberry bushes behind which the headless body of Luigi had lain. There the authorities had picked up the farmer who owned that piece of land and had dumped him into jail. The people of Monticello wanted good numbers for the crime, not justice for the crime. He turned to Pasqualino. "So you don't care to listen to me, either? You haven't spoken all day long."

The parrot squinted a couple of times. His pupils were opaque, they no longer showed their round, funny bewilderment. Bastia resumed pulling the hurdy-gurdy.

"Remember that I brought you up," he went on. "You couldn't even crack an almond when I first met you. Now I am only asking you to speak, to ask me why—it helps me to grasp the ideas. All right, I'll tell you again: the easy numbers don't group together. Wait, first of all you must understand that the perfect group is three."

He stopped pulling and sat down on the handle of the hurdy-gurdy, waiting for Pasqualino's question. He wanted very badly to explain to him the recurrence of three in all the patterns he had ever worked out: happiness was made of bread, bed, and peace; bread was made of flour, water, and yeast; bed was made of mattress, pillow, and sheets; peace was made of wine, women, and dreams.

"You see, Pasqualino," he said, "now I have a group of two: Luigi and the butcher. Between them there is an attraction, but an attraction is not a link." He paused for a few seconds. "Ask me why, Pasqualino."

The parrot rocked slowly along the perch.

"Ask me why," Bastia said again, growing impatient.

Pasqualino blinked and said nothing.

"Yesterday I had thirty-five lire and I spent thirty of them to buy chestnuts for you! Listen to me, and answer me, or I swear I'll starve you to death!"

He opened the drawer, took out half a loaf of dark bread, the

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cabala, Luigi's boots—which he would wear only in the winter—and finally the sock filled with Pasqualino's chestnuts. He piled everything on the board between the handles of the hurdy-gurdy next to the cage and drew out a handful of chestnuts.

"See, look! You rascal—aren't they sweet and crunchy?"

Pasqualino thrust his head between the bars, puffed up his neck, and stretched it out to reach the chestnuts, but one of the boots was in his way. Angrily, he riffled his feathers, pecked at the sole, then with beak and claw he gripped the boot and, instead of pushing it away, dragged it right against the cage.

"Now you are stuck!" Bastia laughed. "What will you do? Eat the leather?"

Pasqualino was nibbling at the boot. He had painstakingly lifted his body, clutching the bars with both claws, and every second he would slide down a little, pull his body up again, and resume nibbling, stubbornly feeling along the thick edge of the sole before biting it. Bastia saw Pasqualino getting hold of a tiny thing, a corner of some paper, and then pulling, pulling, until a small oblong card came out.

"Give it to me," he whispered.

On the card there was a flag and these words:

> The bearer of this card is authorized by the Committee of National Liberation to requisition cattle in behalf of the Partisan Brigades. Payment will be made as soon as a free government is established.

Bastia's face became all wrinkled. He scratched his ear; he felt a great confusion inside his head. But he caught Pasqualino's look, and it was sad and imploring.

"Here, here," he stammered, "eat your chestnuts, eat them all. You are a good fellow, a great fellow. I promise you one day I'll be rich, I promise. Then I'll buy you real peanuts. You remember that professor who told us that your food should be peanuts? But they are too expensive, they come from abroad. You've never seen them. How can I describe them to you? They look like butterfly cocoons—hunchback butterflies, Pasqualino."

That Friday the people of Monticello waited long hours for Bastia and his fortune cards. But Bastia never showed up. In a wake of mazurkas and waltzes, the hurdy-gurdy had jolted through the streets of all the towns in the valley and the surrounding hills—as

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far as Castelnuovo, where it was now resting in front of a butcher shop.

"Don't put stones into candy wrappers or Pasqualino will get mad," Bastia was warning a gang of children.

For one hour he had been watching the shop, and the butcher was never alone. At this moment only one customer was left, but she was still debating whether it was more economical to buy the skinny chicken she held by the feet or the chunk of beef the butcher was showing her. Bastia waved his hand to attract her attention.

"The beef has no bones," he advised her.

The woman bought the chicken and went away. Bastia released the catch, waited until the first notes of a tango sprang from the hurdy-gurdy, and then hurried into the shop.

"Good morning," he said as he entered. "Would you be interested in three good numbers? I'm sorry to disturb you, but this is a real bargain. Three brand-new numbers. You can have them for just a piece of meat."

The butcher wiped his face with the apron. It seemed to Bastia that he was trying to hide behind it, it took him so long.

"I bet you've never heard about American numbers, have you? No, I suppose not. You see, numbers are drawn from lucky stars—that's why Americans are so rich: their sky has more stars than ours."

The butcher turned toward the wall, lifted a quarter of beef from one of the huge hooks, and slammed it down on the marble counter. But Bastia wasn't impressed. He reached out and flipped a bunch of fortune cards under his nose.

"Look, I'm going to tear them to pieces," he announced. "They are no good now that I've learned the American numbers." And he tore up the cards and scattered the pieces over the floor. "In America they have professors, big professors who study the numbers. You think you know the number for death and the one for the moon? Ha, ha, just remember that both of them are wrong!"

Bastia dug into his pocket and pulled out a bunch of papers tied with a shoelace. He began to look through them. He was very tense; now he could feel the butcher's black pupils on the tips of his fingers every time he turned a page.

"Wait, I'll show you. Here it is: Carolina, the widow who lives down in the valley. A fine woman, I say, and she believes in the changing world. 'Carolina, try the American numbers,' I told her, and she put twenty lire on them—twenty lire, mind you, and she

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picks rags for a living! Excuse me, I have to go and wind up my machine."

Bastia backed out of the door into the street, and when the tango ended he moved the pointer to a mazurka, wound up the spring, and returned to the shop, carrying Pasqualino in his cage. "Here is Pasqualino," he announced. "And you, what's your name?"

"Mastrantonio," the butcher answered sharply.

"Pasqualino, meet my friend Mastrantonio. Did you see him nod? He's a really well behaved parrot, and he's smart, too. Do you know how many languages he can speak?"

"What about that woman?" the butcher asked, jerking his apron.

"Woman? Oh, Carolina."

"Yes, Carolina."

"I told you she played twenty lire on the American numbers."

"And?"

Bastia sat down on a stool and placed the cage on the floor.

"Now she's in Rome," he sighed; and seeing that Mastrantonio was about to explode he added promptly, "There wasn't enough money at the post office to pay her three thousand five hundred times twenty lire."

"You mean she won?"

"She promised me a present."

"How did she win? What did you tell her?"

"I told her: 'Carolina, give me your book of numbers—I'll correct them. These are brand-new, they are rich, they come from America.' Carolina has a brother in America—he has two automobiles."

Mastrantonio stepped down from behind the high counter, took off his apron, and sat down opposite Bastia. For a while he punched the palm of his left hand with his right fist; then he stopped, opened his mouth, and again he punched his hand, harder and harder. Bastia quietly continued to scratch Pasqualino under the soft feathers of his chest, attentive as ever, waiting for the words Mastrantonio was going to speak.

"Write down these new numbers for me, too," Mastrantonio said in one breath.

"First you'll give me a couple of pounds of meat," Bastia replied with a smile.

The butcher rushed behind the counter, took a knife, and started to cut. "You forgot to give me the book," Bastia reminded him. "How do you expect me to correct the numbers?"

"You swear that woman Carolina—"

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"I swear."

Mastrantonio wrapped up the meat in a piece of newspaper and went through the door at the rear of the shop. He came out with a book and handed it to Bastia, holding the meat behind his back.

"First write down the new numbers," he said.

Bastia glanced at the cover: the picture on it was not the blindfolded girl stretched out on a golden quilt; it was a kind of trumpet, overflowing with fruits and jewels.

"I'll only correct a few of them to start. You didn't even weigh the meat. Is it lean or fat? I don't like fat meat."

Bastia's ears heard something about beggars who shouldn't be so particular. His eyes seemed to follow the up-and-down motion of the scale. His fingers kept leafing unobtrusively through the book and his mind went on repeating: Does this cabala give different meanings for the numbers? Did Mastrantonio play 72 as the middle link of the crime?

When the butcher told him that, stripped of all the fat, the meat still weighed more than two pounds, Bastia nodded in approval and turned to the page where the column started with 70. "I have to go and lock up my hurdy-gurdy," he said. "Wait just a minute."

He turned his back to the butcher, put the open book on the stool, and bent to pick up Pasqualino's cage. Quick as a shot, he read: 72—*the bride, traveling by coach, the assassin.*

Out in the street he said to Pasqualino, "Will you ever get tired of chestnuts?"

"Why?"

"Because seventy-two doesn't add up to anything—it doesn't even add up to peanuts."

Coming back into the shop, he saw the butcher sitting on the low stool, his thumbs hooked under the armpits of his vest, his dark eyes half shut, with an air of waiting for something to happen.

"Here is a pencil—"

But Bastia didn't hear. He began to pace up and down the narrow passage which led to the door; then he turned abruptly and said, "I've thought it over. I'm not going to give you the new numbers."

"What?"

"You can keep your meat. You don't believe in the order of the world, you are like the people of Monticello."

"I'm from Rispoli," Mastrantonio replied. "It's down South, near the Straits."

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"North or South, people are all the same when they're fools." Bastia put the cage on the counter and clapped his hands in a gesture of discouragement. "Do you know Cassiopeia?"

"Where does she live?"

"Tonight she'll be on top of the belfry at Monticello— Don't stare at me!" Bastia screamed so unexpectedly that the butcher became pale. "I'm not crazy! I can name every star in the sky! The people of Monticello make fun of me, they don't listen to me, and so now they've lost the greatest chance of their lives. Tell it to him, Pasqualino!"

"Why?"

The butcher snapped up from the stool. "Who said why?"

"You did."

"I did not!"

"Then it was the parrot—who cares? Let me get up on this counter, I was born to sit on marble. Oh, how Cassiopeia was shining, that sweet and lucky Cassiopeia! And the people of Monticello didn't realize that their great day had come, because they watch the sky only for rain or snow and never for the portentous signs of the stars. The rules of numbers are drawn from the stars. Below Cassiopeia lay the body of a man whose head had been chopped off."

Bastia slid promptly from the counter. An old lady entered the shop and asked for a pound of giblets.

"Giblets?"

"Yes, giblets."

"Giblets," Mastrantonio repeated stupidly.

"I'm sorry, I just bought the last of them," Bastia explained. "Good day, madam. And the people of Monticello," he resumed as soon as the lady was out of sight, "those morons played the numbers for the beheaded man, the butchering, and the assassin—" he banged his chest and spat on the floor "—without thinking that any man could be a beheaded man whose body had been strung up by the feet, and that any other man who had got rid of a head could be an assassin! Imbeciles! The rule of Cassiopeia says that the important numbers don't show, that what counts is *what's missing,* and that only when everything is in its place, with its name and its reason, so that no confusion is possible, only *then* do the right numbers group together, bright as the first stars after sunset!"

He put his foot on the stool and climbed up on the counter again, hugging Pasqualino's cage with one arm. "And now tell me, Mastrantonio: what was missing there? Can't you see? The head was

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missing, the head wasn't there, the head was important! And what else was missing, the reason was important! But something else wasn't there: justice was missing, justice wasn't there, and justice is the most important of all—because justice has no number for itself: *it is what links the other numbers together!*"

A twitch was running over Mastrantonio's lips. Before Bastia could continue, he jumped up and kicked the stool, shouting, "Get out! You have green eyes, you bring bad luck—get out!"

"First, I'd like to tell you the number I found," Bastia said calmly, picking up the cage. "Then I'll go. Write it down if you want to—fifty-five. It's the reason for the crime."

"What's fifty-five?" the butcher snapped, and his pupils were small and nasty.

"Cattle."

Mastrantonio sat down. "Who told you?"

"Pasqualino."

"Get out, you and your crazy bird! Get out, get out!"

"All right, I'll go. But don't say that Pasqualino is crazy—he has been living for more than two hundred years, he spots the truth wherever it is, he never cracks an empty shell!" Bastia slid off the counter. "All right, remember the rule of Cassiopeia. Ah, I almost forgot," he added from the threshold, "the rule says also that when you find one of the missing things it will lead you to another one. I think I've found the second number. Good day, Mastrantonio."

The butcher grabbed Bastia by the arm and pulled him back.

"Is he possessed?" he muttered, pointing at the parrot.

"He was blessed by the bishop of his town," Bastia answered gravely. "He is like a human being, except that he doesn't lie."

"You swear?"

"I swear."

"Otherwise I'll choke him. Was it he who told you the second number?"

"May I sit here? Thank you, I love marble—it's cool and smooth," Bastia remarked, climbing back onto the counter. "You can follow its veins all the way through, like thoughts in a brain. Look here: I'll start from this black spot and I'll show you. Here is cattle. Now ask yourself: who owns cattle? Let's see. Move your finger along this streak—that's a thought winding into your brain—and what do you find at the end of it? You find a peasant. A peasant owns cattle, right?

"Now, put your finger down again and follow this second streak,

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that's right—and when you reach the end, what do you have? You have a butcher—a butcher owns cattle, too. See how it works? And now switch to the third streak, this yellow one that's as straight as a dart, and let your finger run along it until you meet a landowner—a landowner owns cattle."

Bastia paused, his eyes on Mastrantonio's finger. He saw the butcher's finger stiffen, and again the twitch ran over Mastrantonio's lips. Then Bastia rapped his forehead lightly with his knuckles.

"Do you see how a brain can work?" he said. "So, where are we? A landowner owns cattle, or a peasant, or a butcher. But here we are stuck, because if someone steals ten cows from a landowner, or a single pig from a peasant, or one quarter of beef from a butcher, the hatred is the same and a man could be killed for it. So we still don't know who the killer is. But the rule of Cassiopeia says also that when you find one of the missing things it will always lead to another.

"So let's think together: what kind of man would steal cattle? He might be a thief, and then the peasant, the landowner, or the butcher might kill him. But if he were just a thief, would they kill him and chop off his head? No, they wouldn't. So the man who was killed had stolen cattle, but he was not a thief. And so there is only one possibility for the second number: it's the only clean, lucky number that the war brought us: eleven, *the partisan*. Partisans would take away cattle to be able to carry on the fight in the mountains, but they are not thieves."

Slowly Mastrantonio's finger slid back along the yellow streak on the marble. "If you have the third number," he stammered, "will they come out for sure? Will you win a million lire?"

"No, by God, no," Bastia sighed, getting off the counter. "You are as dumb as the people of Monticello. The head is missing, and the killer is missing, and justice is missing. Do I have to repeat it all over again?"

"What should I do?" the butcher asked—and tiny bubbles crept from underneath his tongue.

"Listen, Mastrantonio, one thing leads to another, I told you! Look for the head—the head may show the killer. Do you remember what happened to John the Baptist? A woman became crazy with love for him, and he was cold as ice. She felt so terribly insulted that she chopped his head off. So if you had found the head of John the Baptist, you could have easily guessed who the killer was."

"And if—if I don't find the head?"

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"If you don't find the head, look for the killer." Bastia's green eyes had become two narrow slits. "One thing leads to the other—the head shows the killer, the killer shows the head. Then there will be justice, and justice will link the numbers together and give you a million lire. Now I must go, it's getting late."

"Wait, wait, take your meat!"

"Keep it," Bastia replied, stepping out into the street. "You are as dumb as the people of Monticello."

He turned back and gave him a hard look. "This is your chance, Mastrantonio. Don't be a fool!"

Two days later, a farmer, dripping with sweat and covered with dust, entered the main square of Monticello. He was carrying a basket, his outstretched arm holding it carefully away from his body, as if he were taking a mangy dog to the veterinary. A gang of children were walking at his side, storming him with questions, and the farmer kept quickening his pace and saying no at every step, and once he even made a gesture as though to kick a little girl when she tried to put her hand inside the basket. When he reached the carabinieri station, he called out, "Brigadiere, brigadiere, come down! Hurry, hurry!"

In shops and houses people heard him call. In a minute the shops and houses were empty. The crowd saw him in the room on the main floor, the basket on the table and the brigadiere closing the shutters of the window, and so they swarmed in, filled the corridor, and pushed the door open.

"Everyone out!" the brigadiere shouted.

No one moved.

"Then keep quiet!"

Someone sneaked over to the table and screamed, "The head, the head!"

The scream echoed through the corridor and out into the square. The people inside the room moved slowly, the women murmuring prayers, the men coughing awkwardly, all staring at the basket, at the bundle in the basket, wrapped in newspapers on which they could read, *The Anzio Landing,* and nothing else, because it was all splattered and wrinkled, and here and there it was torn and black hair showed through.

"You say you found it just above the embankment," the brigadiere said. "Let's see. You, Pirotta, go to the Town Hall and call the Mayor. He was so sure the head would never show up. He wanted to make

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a bet with me. He certainly doesn't understand the mechanics of criminal psychology!"

The people looked at the brigadiere respectfully. The carabiniere came back and said that the Mayor was not in his office.

"Then we will examine it now," the brigadiere decided. "Give me a pair of scissors."

He began to cut away the newspaper. A green fly entered the room through the window and stopped, hanging in the air just above the basket. The brigadiere cut the paper round and round, laid down the scissors, rolled up his shirt sleeves, and pulled the wrappings away with one jerk. With his other hand he lifted up the head of the Mayor.

The following Monday, at about sunset, the people of Monticello were gathered in the square. They were waiting for the numbers to be pasted in the window and were speaking excitedly about the terrible things which had happened. They were anxious to know the truth, but the truth was a secret; the brigadiere and the carabinieri were deaf and dumb, and the Chief of Police who had come from the city with two special agents and a doctor had declared that the work of justice couldn't be hampered by unsolicited statements. Only the priest and the pharmacist had been admitted into the narrow circle of the authorities.

The people of Monticello glanced from time to time at the balcony of the Town Hall, where the authorities were sitting, and then at the White Horse Inn, where a supper had been ordered for them in the small secluded room upstairs.

"A clear case of homicidal mania," the doctor was saying to the brigadiere. "What did that butcher Mastrantonio tell you when you showed him the basket and the knife you found near Don Marco's body? He explained to you, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that he needed the head, that the Mayor refused to tell him where the head was, so he just decided that the head of the Mayor was the thing, because it would show the killer. There is a tragic boastfulness in these maniacs, they love to horrify their audience."

"Allow me to say," the pharmacist interrupted, "that superstition—the numbers he mentioned, and the stars. The agent told us that the crowd in the shop asked him to give them the numbers—you see, they are all crazy for numbers, they didn't want him to be taken away before he could give them the numbers."

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"As far as I'm concerned—" the brigadiere smiled humbly "—it's a case of sex perversion. When I was in Rome at the school of criminology, I read the works of an Englishman who— Anyway, there are people who chop heads off chickens or ducks to have—" He threw a glance at the priest, who was listening attentively, and added, "You understand."

In the farthest corner of the square, Bastia was sitting on the handle of his hurdy-gurdy, talking softly to Pasqualino. "Take a look at the authorities," he was saying, "I bet they're swearing that the Mayor was a nice man, a great soul. Do you remember how many times I spat when I passed his villa? There were always German cars in front of his villa, he was entertaining those bastards. Oh, the authorities don't believe the story that Mastrantonio tried to tell them on his way to jail. It's so easy not to believe a scoundrel like Mastrantonio, who used to go around telling the farmers that the Mayor would keep their cattle in his barn and protect it from the Germans with his own authority!"

On the balcony, the Chief of Police looked at the brigadiere with severity and put an end to his description of other sexual perversions.

"When I make my report to Rome," the Chief announced solemnly, "I shall stress the fact that there is a deliberate attempt in this case to distort a common crime into a political reprisal, and to exploit the favor—whether it be right or wrong is not for me to judge—which the partisans enjoy. In fact, everyone knows that the Mayor—and I may say, all of us—have always regarded the partisans with favor."

"Pay attention, Pasqualino, instead of trying to scratch your back," Bastia said impatiently. "Mastrantonio slaughtered the cattle and everything was beautifully arranged for the Germans to arrive in the middle of the night and pretend to be looting the countryside, so that the Mayor would appear to be a victim. They had offered him more than one million lire for that cattle. But that night the partisans showed up first, took the cattle, and left only a card for a receipt. The Germans could pay millions with the money taken from our people, but the partisans couldn't pay, you understand?"

"What a fantastic concoction of lies!" the Chief of Police was commenting, after having listened to the written report which the agent had prepared. "It is simply preposterous to make the Mayor kill a partisan who has escaped from the Germans, when the Mayor himself was supporting the families of those other three partisans who had been executed!"

"But you see, Pasqualino," Bastia went on, "the Mayor only pre-

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tended to help the partisans. He promised to send them other food, to any locality they chose, as long as it was far from his farm, because certainly the Germans were suspicious. And when everything was planned and the night came to deliver the food, the barn where the partisans were waiting was surrounded by the Germans. Three partisans were killed and buried, but nobody suspected that a fourth one had escaped. That one was Luigi. Luigi came back and wanted to know why. The Mayor killed him, and for the butchering he called Mastrantonio, who was already his accomplice in robbing the peasants of their cattle. The Mayor got rid of the head, Mastrantonio loaded the body on his cart, among quarters of beef, and later rolled it down the embankment."

"Supper must be ready," the Chief of Police was saying, "I can smell the roast. Have I made myself clear? No one can possibly make a coherent story out of the butcher's statements. This incoherence justifies our only—I insist, our only—possible deduction: that this Mastrantonio is guilty of both crimes and that he is mentally deficient."

"But wait a minute," said the brigadiere, "I forgot to tell you something." He smiled and was on the brink of saying that the Mayor had shown a queer cocksuredness in betting that the head would never be found, but at the same time he remembered that his forthcoming promotion depended on a relative of the Mayor so he stopped talking and meekly followed the Chief of Police down the stairs.

Bastia shoved his finger between the bars of the cage and let Pasqualino perch on it—such a gentle, good little creature.

"Yes, Pasqualino," he whispered, "if Mastrantonio had gone to look for justice at the police station, he would merely have been thrown into jail as a murderer and slanderer who starved his farmhands and they protect each other, and if Don Marco were still alive they would certainly give him a banquet—yes, even now. And so I had to teach Mastrantonio the rule of Cassiopeia, I had to confuse him into linking the numbers together with his own hands. But don't think I'm so smart—it was you who gave me the real hint.

"When you picked up Luigi's partisan card a thought crossed the sky, quick and clear as a shooting star: Don Marco, the landowner who starved his farmhands and entertained the Germans, and then rushed to welcome the Americans and made that speech for the liberation, and began to send money to the families of those three partisans who had been killed and buried.

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"Why should such a bastard send money to the partisans' families? Only if he were scared!

"So the attractions that keep the world moving started to work again, and the Mayor Don Marco had to be added to Luigi and the butcher. The butcher lived in Castelnuovo, the same town in which the Mayor had his estate, and probably he did his slaughtering for him.

"That's why I went to see Mastrantonio's cabala book—I was sure seventy-two was the Mayor. But the cabala didn't tell me anything; I had to use my own judgment.

"You remember when I asked Mastrantonio to trace the streaks on the marble? Well, when I explained that the yellow streak led to a landowner, his finger became stiff—it stopped moving as suddenly as though it were stuck in a splotch of tar. Then I had no more doubts, and I forced the rule of Cassiopeia into his brain: the head shows the killer, the killer shows the head. I meant the head of Luigi, but anyway no other head could have shown the killer better than the head of Don Marco himself."

Bastia opened the drawer of his hurdy-gurdy and patted Luigi's boots with sympathy. Then he gave Pasqualino a chestnut, and he put three in his mouth, because no one had bought his fortune cards and he was broke again. But he had seen Cassiopeia peeping above the belfry in the first shadow of night, and he was dreaming of a jug of wine and a bed. The right numbers would come up, now that justice was done: 15, *the patriot*—41, *the traitor*—67, *the accomplice*. Three thousand five hundred times twenty lire. He was calm and confident.

When the people rushed to the window of the post office, Bastia pushed his hurdy-gurdy through the square, climbed onto the handle, and strained his eyes to see. Not one of his three numbers had been drawn.

He felt so weak that he almost dropped to the ground. Slowly an idea began to creep behind his forehead. But it was too difficult to be told in words; he pointed at the sky and drew a circle with a sweep of his arm, an all-embracing circle.

"You see, Pasqualino," he said, "there are rules for the numbers and there are rules for the stars. There are so many things in the universe, more than the cabala can list, and all of them turn with the sky and group together in constantly new patterns. If a man

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could know the rules of the universe, he wouldn't be playing the lottery."

"Why?" Pasqualino asked.

DETECTIVERSE

LADIES' NIGHT OUT

by EMILY NEWLAND

In London the honorable Mrs. A.
Grew weary of whist and bored with crochet
And tea shops and gardens and things of that sort
To which ladies like Mrs. A. ofttimes resort.
"I need an adventure," she said with a sigh.
Her hubby, at hearthside, snored in reply—
So she bid him farewell and shot him point-blank
And went out that evening and burgled a bank.

Meanwhile, the disreputable Mrs. B.
Grew weary of arson and larceny
And murder and mayhem and things of that sort
To which ladies like Mrs. B. ofttimes resort.
"I need an adventure," she said with a sigh.
Her partner in crime sneered in reply—
So she bid him farewell and, in manner most regal,
Went out that evening and did something legal.

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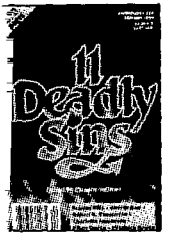

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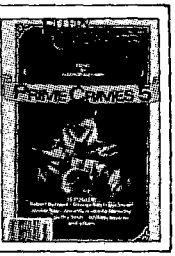

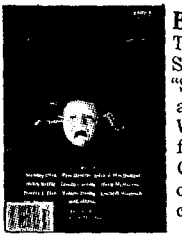

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The fourth of *Ellery Queen's Prime Crimes* mystery stories never before published in the U.S., most of them never before published anywhere focuses, as the title indicates, on crime, both organized and disorganized. (Several are *very* disorganized.) Enjoy it.

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Just about everything you could tie a necktie around was tied up in a necktie—all sickly orange things with brilliant sunsets painted on them. They were all different, some of them old and some new. Even Hunnicutt, with Homicide, said he'd never seen anything like it . . .

FATHER'S DAY SPECIAL

by DAN CRAWFORD

I suppose you think it's a real whee being Mirror Man. The stuff dreams are made of, right? There's all the responsibility and power, fighting the malefactors who seek to undermine our society.

To tell the truth, it's a dead bore. The stuff dreams are made of, right: I'd fallen asleep more times than I'd spotted any malefactors. In fact, I'd had just the one malefactor in two weeks—a shrimpy little shoplifter. He was too small to reel in, so I let him go. I never saw him again.

Mind you, there may be more interesting places to seek malefactors than in the men's accessories department. Or maybe I was doing it wrong. I'm not the real Mirror Man, just a self-appointed substitute, watching for one specific malefactor.

If you aren't a dedicated shopper, you may not know Mirror Man. He's easiest to spot during peak shopping periods: the whole Christmas season, for example, or on special-sale weekends. See there, at the end of the counter? That column covered with mirrors wasn't there last week. The way they shift displays around, you'd never know unless you were really paying attention. And unless you keep track of these things, you won't remember that that column was halfway across the store last month.

Because it isn't a solid column. It's kind of a fishhouse, really, like the ones people set out on the ice in winter. Inside, the fisherman—a store detective—is keeping an eye on high-demand or high-price items. If you pick something up and slide it into your sleeve, he calls to another detective out on the floor to nail you before you leave.

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"Book him, Raul"—another triumph for Mirror Man. Not every store uses a column with two-way mirrors all around it, but they've all got some kind of Mirror Man watching over the store's profits.

I was after a little larger game than the usual Mirror Man, and my credentials weren't official. I had to promise many things before I was allowed to use the little fishhouse, and now that two weeks had gone by there were rumblings from the store manager that I might be on the wrong track. My editor was rumbling the same way. Redundant, all of it, for I had rumbled much the same thing, sitting in that little house all day, taking pretty poor pictures of anyone who bought a necktie.

It sounds like a very cheap comic-book story: Mirror Man on the Trail of Necktie Man.

From the very first corpse, we knew this was a serial killer with a difference. Oh, sure, I know you aren't a serial killer from the very first corpse. You have to have two or three. But everyone who covered the story agreed that this guy would be around.

She was naked, and she was clothed. Just about everything you could tie a necktie around was tied up in a necktie—all sickly orange things with brilliant sunsets painted on them. They were all different, some of them old and some new. Even Hunnicutt, with Homicide, said he'd never seen anything like it. He jumped when they started to remove the body and somebody triggered the necktie that played the Woody Woodpecker theme.

She wasn't tied down, only tied up. There were no signs of torture or sexual molestation. Only one necktie had been tied on before death—the one at her throat, the murder weapon. The rest were all added after strangulation, just to decorate the body.

We all speculated on motive, in columns of varying length and depth, depending on the intellectual qualities of our editors. But there wasn't one, really. She was just a sales clerk who lived alone. There *were* some boy friends, but none of them proved to be worth picking up. In the absence of any developments whatsoever in the case (at least so far as we were told about any), she slipped off the front pages after only three days.

Now, the next two corpses did better: five and eight days, respectively. Because by now it was a pattern, a string. Corpse Three was another female sales clerk, strangled, stripped, and decked with fulsome paisleys. But Corpse Two had interrupted that pattern. This man had never worked in a store—in fact, he hadn't been working

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regularly at all of late. Once a model, he had given that up to look for "serious theater work." Of course, murder was redundant in his case: he was starving to death as it was. He was tied in a tasteful assortment of solid black ties of outdated width.

It was between Two and Three that I started to work out my Mirror Man scheme. After the death of Three, I tried to put it across. My editor didn't like it.

"I don't pay you to sit around the mall all day doing nothing," she told me. "I pay you to sit around here all day doing nothing."

Four and Five brought The Necktie Strangler up to national news proportions. Four was another clerk, male this time, bound in neckties with diagonal stripes. Five was a displaced hippie who had been trying to make a living hawking paintings on black velvet at the edges of art fairs around the city. She was wound up in Christmas neckties, but she was found on Memorial Day.

No one had found any motive so far. The killer wasn't writing letters to the papers, unless my editor was saving them for her old age. No police investigator and no reporter found any connection among the five victims, except that they all lived alone.

"It's the only clue anybody's got," I told my editor. "The killer's got to be getting the neckties from somewhere. Just get some guys to watch the necktie departments at the big department stores around town and see who's buying in quantity."

"Huh," she told me.

So I threw in my clincher. "You know that if we don't do it, the *Sun-Gazette* will."

And so our brigade of substitute Mirror Men went out. Because it had been my idea, I got the longest shift and my pick of stores. (You may think the tie-buying habits of the American shopper would make a cute human-interest story. They wouldn't.) I also got to sift through all the notes and photographs the other Mirror Men came up with. I did get overtime for some of this—it wasn't enough.

See, I had made my job more difficult by unerringly choosing the two weeks before Father's Day to run this surveillance. So the Mirror Men got lots of pictures. Hundreds of shoppers of varying ages buying a tie here and a tie there. But nobody was buying in bulk. On three occasions we found a person who bought ties in more than one store. I got their names, after much pleading and bullying, from clerks and managers who guard credit-card receipts with their lives. Wasted effort as far as we could tell: one had moved to the area just

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a week before and the other two had pretty good alibis for some of the murders. In fact, one of them was being interviewed at the approximate time Murder Six was going on.

Six was another store clerk, and his murder was distinguished only by what the pathologist called "increased indications of violence." This meant the maroon neckties with which he was bound were all tied tight as tourniquets and one had been balled up and shoved into his mouth.

It would take another week or so before my editor lost patience entirely, but I could see the signs already: a little tightening of the lips when she saw me, that crease just above her nose whenever The Necktie Strangler came up. I figured I'd be lucky to get a job writing obituaries if nothing turned up by Father's Day.

I pored over crummy photographs and scribbled notes. Every face was engraved on my memory. Even so, I started carrying the scrapbooks with me into the Mirror Man house for quick reference in case any slavering murderers turned up at the tie counter and I couldn't place them.

Half the people I "recognized," of course, weren't in the book. One woman made me half frantic, flipping through and through the scrapbooks for her face. It wasn't until she turned to go that I looked up and saw that she was the twin of whatever model had posed for the suspenders ad opposite me. (Oh, you know the one: the male model has his coat open to show off his new suspenders and the woman is sort of climbing up his right arm with one hand under the suspender.)

And then there was a little man with a brown hairline in full retreat. I went through the scrapbooks twice before I found him. He was in the background of five different shots, just behind the person who was actually buying the tie and being photographed. He never bought a tie himself. And when I saw him lean way over the counter to read some papers behind it while the clerk had her back turned, I understood. I don't know all the reporters from the *Sun-Gazette*, but his beady little eyes should have told me he was from our distinguished competition.

I mentioned him to the manager as I was going off duty. "Oh, now what's going to be in the papers?" she sighed. "What was he looking at?"

I pointed. She bustled across to see what was exposed to view.

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"Oh, he can't make much out of that," she said, coming back. "It's just the staff directory."

"Ah. Probably looking up people to interview."

She pursed her lips. "So now we'll have a reporter harassing the staff at home. Oh, why couldn't the strangler have used belts or scarves? The scarf department's been growing beyond all reason."

I nodded and as I stepped out from behind the necktie counter my knee brushed a stand holding a display of black ties with mushrooms painted on them.

"Do you actually sell these?" I asked.

She raised her eyebrows and her nose. "A few. For Father's Day or Christmas. They're amusing novelties."

"Mushrooms," I said. "What kind of mind would paint a mushroom on a necktie?" I flipped one over to check the label.

"Various artists," she said. "Some local, some not. If they're not receiving federal grants, they've got to live somehow."

I recognized a name. I wondered what it meant. Then I slid down the counter and reached across to pick up the staff directory. "Do you know all these people?"

"They're my *staff*," she informed me.

"Which of them are single?"

"Sir?"

But she told me, and after I ransomed my car at the parking basement, I drove off to check them out.

He was at the fourth place I stopped, an apartment house way north on Clark. When I pulled in, he was walking up the alley, nodding to himself. He stood and studied the front door and the call buttons for some minutes. Then he got into his own car and drove away. I followed along.

But he didn't stop at any of the other addresses on my list. Instead, he continued to the 'burbs, where he pulled up to a white two-story item with a basketball hoop in the side yard. He went inside.

I counted to eighty and walked to the front door. After I rang, the door opened.

She wore a smile that could be called nice if it had been that definite, and a dress without sleeves, waist, or any pretense to fashion. I put her at somewhere between thirty and eighty-seven. She blinked at me. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, actually, ma'am," I said, with a smile, "I'd like to talk to the man who just came in. Your—husband?"

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She glanced back over her shoulder. "Why, yes. Henry. Why? What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, ma'am," I told her. "I'm with the *Register.*" I showed her my card. "One of our photographers was taking some pictures at a stoplight and a bird perched on some of the cars while they were stopped. Turned out it was a crane from the zoo. And he got some interesting pictures of drivers who didn't know a stork was perched on the car. Of course, he couldn't run out and ask their names, but he took down the license numbers. We think the picture of your husband is very good, but of course we need a signed photo release from him and we'd like to ask him if he wants his name printed in the caption or not."

She blinked once or twice but she didn't object to any of it. "Oh, how quaint," she said, "a stork! Come in! Perhaps you'd better go right back and talk to him, because he has to go back to the office and work late." She pointed. "Right there to the left."

I passed through a living room in which perfectly matched furniture sat at right angles across a nice carpet that wouldn't show the dirt. Henry's wife followed only halfway, asked if I'd like coffee, and disappeared in another direction.

I turned left and found a man opening his briefcase on the bed. He whirled to demand, "Who are you?"

My mouth was open to answer, but no sound came out. His closet stood open.

They were every shade of the rainbow, and some the rainbow hadn't yet come up with. They started at the door, in black, and shaded gently into brown, purple, and all tints and variations to white on the far side. They hung on hooks, on pants hangers and coat hangers, from shoebags and hatracks. Antique tie-racks with four-inch spikes were loaded to the tip. He had the mushrooms. He had hunting horns and pheasants and starbursts and monograms. He had stripes and spots and balloons, plaids and paisleys, and even a portrait of himself on an extra-wide brown tie.

"All those neckties!" I whispered.

He had had ample time to break my neck as I stood gawking. But when I looked at him his hands were around his own throat.

"Neckties!" he croaked. "Neckties!"

"What is it about neckties?" I demanded. "You killed an artist who painted them, a model who showed them, and four clerks who sold them. You've staked out another clerk for tonight. What's the problem?"

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"Neckties!" he said again, and he pointed at the closet.

"Yes," I said, turning, "you have—"

"Other men get books, pipes, cognac, cruises to Dundee!" he cried. "I get neckties! Father's Day, Christmas, birthdays—it's always the same. My father before me got neckties! God save me, I gave him neckties for Father's Day. And he left them all to me! My grandfather! All I got from my grandfather's will was—"

He sobbed into a dark-blue item showing a scantily clad woman leaning on a lamppost. "Neckties! I hate neckties! But they're all gifts, so I can't even throw them away!"

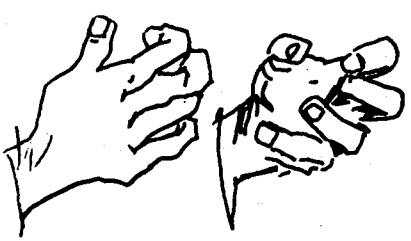
"Now, now," I said, reaching a hand out to his shoulder.

I really should have known better than to touch him. He sprang like a released trap, his hands going automatically to my throat, to my own necktie.

Fortunately, I was wearing a fake, and it came off in his hands. I swung him around and slammed him into the wall to take a little of the breath out of him. Only the closet door was still open, with all those tie-racks, their spikes in ready ranks.

He screamed and dropped to the floor, writhing. Neckties fluttered down on him like falling leaves. He tore at them, but they were too well made and he did very little damage beyond a few wrinkles.

No, I can't say this was Mirror Man's finest hour. Still, The Necktie Strangler's career was ended. Everyone feels he'll get off by pleading insanity and spend the rest of his life in a hospital somewhere. I'm happy for him, I guess. I've never yet seen a hospital where the patients wear neckties.



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a new Yukon story in verse . . .

QUESTION OF HONOR

by JOHN DOBBYN

I was born in a land that they can't understand,
Any more than they understand me,
In a land that's locked tight in a prison of ice
And I guess that's the reason we're free.
We cling to the edge of God's farthermost shore,
Where the Arctic is jealous of life.
We exist by depending on every man's trust,
Like a man would depend on his wife.
I guess I was filled with that same kind of trust
When I journeyed too far from those shores
To an outpost of Hell they call Skagway down south,
With its gamblers and cutthroats and whores.
I walked into town like an innocent cub,
I was dazzled and stunned by it all,
From the music that roared from the crowded saloons
To the games and occasional brawl.
When they saw me they laughed, called me "Eskimo Boy."
I was not even sure what it meant,
But I figured I'd smile and they'd leave me alone
When the brunt of their jokes had been spent.
I could not speak a word of their gibberish tongue,
But I managed to make myself clear
To the man who ran one of the honkytonk bars
And he finally got the idea.
He gave me a job doing all kinds of things
That the other men there wouldn't do
And for nearly five years, I had food and a bed—
I was luckier then than I knew.
I was always alone, but I used the time well
To learn all that I'd need to survive,

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I learned how to speak and use money for food
And, most of all, just stay alive.
But through all that was dark, there was one shining light
Like a glimmer that softened the night:
I could swear that an angel came down from above
Just to brighten my life with her light.
There were those, I suppose, who might say she was tough,
But I'll tell you, there wasn't a day
That I didn't thank God for the kind little word
That she never neglected to say.
She was one of the girls that they hired to dance
With the men who came under her charm—
I pretended to work, but I kept her in sight
Just to see that she came to no harm.
I guess that what finally happened one night
Was just naturally destined to be:
I was off in the back, hauling booze to the bar,
Where I just wasn't able to see.
I was stunned by a scream that rose over the din
And I ran 'cause I knew it was her.
I looked up to the balcony over the bar
And I broke like a horse to a spur,
I vaulted a table and made for the stairs—
I could just see her head and no more.
She was caught in the grip of a mountainous man
Who was dragging her back to a door,
I was up on the stairs, climbing three at a time,
'Fore I thought what I'd do at the top.
Then she screamed and I knew there was no time for thought—
If I tried, there was no way to stop.
As I rounded the rail, he was pulling her in,
Her arms seemed to flail and to thresh,
It was all I could do just to lower my head
And charge into that mountain of flesh.
He went reeling but caught himself just 'fore he fell
And he grabbed an old jug from the floor,
He smashed it so spikes of the glass were exposed
And he charged like a bear through the door.
I backed till the bannister held me in check,
Then I twisted and bent as he lunged,

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The glass bit in deep, but it threw him off-stride
And he bellowed a curse as he plunged.
The pain in my back held me hunched on the rail,
But I strained to see what was below:
They were gathered around him and pointing at me—
I heard, "Get him! The Injun's killed Joe!"
Before I could move, she was there at my side
Almost lifting me back through the door,
I went out by the window and dropped to the snow
And I crawled till my strength was no more.

By the following dawn, I was rested enough
To head north, though the going was slow.
It was painful at first, but I knew with each step
That I should have gone ages ago.
I traveled by day, though at that time of year
There were precious few hours of light,
I would run while I could and then burrow in snow
For the frigid, raw hours of night.
And I guess I was close, maybe less than a week,
From the home that was half of my soul
When I spotted that cursed black dot to the rear,
And it grew as I ran toward the goal.
It grew every day, till I finally knew
That I'd never be free of its curse,
So I sat down and waited to let it draw on,
Because running would just make it worse.
They say those Canadian Mounties are tough
And the word is they'll grip like a dog
To the quarry they've set till they've run it to ground,
And then cling like a bear to a log.
He faced me up straight with the charge that I'd killed,
He had witnesses more than he'd need—
I tried to explain, but his duty was clear
And I'd have to stand trial for the deed.
Not a witness or juror or judge in that town
Would be likely to see me turned loose.
He was deaf to the facts when I told him the truth,
Though a trial in that town meant the noose—

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It was his deck to deal, though I knew it was stacked
By his blind sort of faith in the law.
If I ran, he'd just track me till one of us died,
I was caught like a rat in his paw,
So I gave him my word that I'd give him no fight,
Even helped get his dogs turned around,
And we started the trek that I thought was my last
Over snowbound and ice-crusted ground.
For the first hundred miles, it was flat as a board,
Then we came to where volcanic heaves
Pushed up peaks under snow with crevasses below
With the treacherous ice-traps that leaves.

We were twenty days gone—I remember the day
Like it happened last Tuesday a week:
It was my turn to drive, and I'd stood on the rails
Till my throat was too frozen to speak.
I saw it loom up, but I couldn't pull back,
I just screamed, but there wasn't a sound.
With a crack like a split in the seam of the earth,
A great mouth opened up in the ground.
One by one, every dog was sucked over the edge
And I grabbed for the Mountie and lunged,
But the straps of the sled held him fast to the bed,
My grip broke, and I watched as he plunged.
He careened off the jagged convulsions of ice
Till I heard a faint splashing below
And I worked my way down, holding hard to each edge,
But the ice made it painfully slow.
I was not even sure he could still be alive,
I just figured I'd give it a try,
Then my grip broke away and I dropped like a sack,
But the place where I landed was dry.
It was dark, but I heard water lapping the ice
So I crawled to the point of the sound,
I reached down in the turbulent, gurgling depth
And my hand touched a hard, floating mound.
I desperately pawed it for something to grab,
And I found it—the hood of his coat.

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I worked it around till it came to the edge
Like a floundering derelict boat.
I dug in with my heels and I pulled with a strength
That I know was much more than my own.
He was stiff as a board, but I got him on land
And I stripped him right down to the bone.
I cut up my parka and leggings for fur
And I fashioned an igloo of snow,
I lined it with pelts, fur-side down, like a pouch,
And I pulled him inside from below.
Like an icy cadaver, his breath had been stilled,
But in minutes he started to shake
And the warmth of my body brought life to his bones
Till he shook like a seven-point quake.
In less than an hour, the shivering stopped
And the color came back to his face,
He was sort of delirious, screaming out loud
That he burned with the heat of the place,
But I held him right there, 'cause I knew he was cold
And his mind had been just overtaxed.
He eventually slept—and I guess I did, too,
Every muscle and bone just relaxed.

I woke up in the dark when the Mountie cried out,
Fighting hard to break loose from the sack.
If he ever got out with no clothes in that cold,
I was sure that he'd never get back,
So I held him and talked of my home long ago
Till he seemed to slip back in a dream—
I figured that time was no friend to us now
And I'd better come up with a scheme,
I sensed more than saw something ten feet away
And I gambled my life it would help.
I scrambled outside and I felt my way close
To a dog that was too weak to yelp:
It was one of the team—I found others close by—
But the others were just about dead,
They'd been steady and loyal when strength was our need,
But now warmth was required instead.

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I carried the one to a place by the man,
So the two of them lay side by side,
It would keep back the cold while I traveled for help.
Sometimes strange how the Lord will provide.

I crawled on that ledge for what seemed like a week,
Feeling inches ahead of my way,
Till at some point the darkness just seemed to give in
To that sweet, saving sunlight of day.
From there I just walked, God knows where, God knows how,
I had no real direction in mind,
But I figured I'd die if I stayed where I was,
So I moved toward whatever I'd find.
It could have been days or it could have been weeks,
I kept on without reason or rhyme,
Till I felt my legs go and I fell to the snow—
I was down for the very last time.
I knew I was slipping away from this life,
When an arm yanked me back from the dream
And my lips seemed to burn with a hot liquid flow
And my nose was dilated with steam.
I tried to wrench free from the grip I was in,
But those arms held me close to the brew,
Then that bitter-sharp taste brought me back to my youth
And I sucked in that Eskimo stew.

It was all that I needed to gain enough strength
To go back to that cavern of snow:
He was there where I left him, a half inch from death,
But I fed him and took him in tow.
We lived with that band that had found me half dead
Till we both could be up on our way—
I had made a decision to follow no man,
I was going to head north come what may.
I told him direct it was his turn to move,
He could shoot me, and there it would end.
When he moved his right hand, it was not for his gun
But to shake my own hand like a friend.

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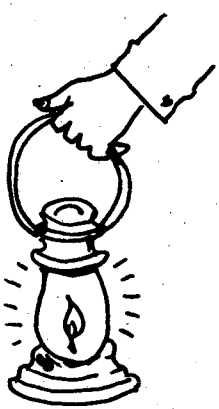
When I turned to walk on, there were tears in my eyes—
For the first time I'd passed a great test:
A white man had learned to put faith in my word,
He believed me above all the rest.
To a man of my tribe, that's more precious than life,
Maybe that's why I waited till then:
Without honor I couldn't go back to my land,
Now in peace I could go home again.

It was deep into March when the Mountie got back
To the town where his trek had begun.
He went into the bar where old Joe had been killed
And they asked if the Eskimo'd won.
"No, I found him," he said.
"Well then, where did he go? Did he shake you with Eskimo lies?"
"Not a man in this world, white or red, do I trust—"
And he looked them right straight in the eyes—
"I had to decide between your claim and his,
Between murder and pure self-defense.
I don't give a plug nickel for his word or yours,
It's only the facts that make sense.
And the evidence came when he stripped off his coat
To bring warmth to my bones in that sack:
As we lay in that pouch, I could feel the blood flow
From the wound that Joe made in his back."



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a ***NEW*** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Sam Corbin turned his face to the fire. "So if I don't give that avaricious politico a share of the proceeds from the sale of my business, he intends to order a hit."

"Sooner rather than later," Paradiso confirmed. "And he wants your answer now."

Corbin looked up. "Tell the man I refuse to pay."

Paradiso went to the doorway of the book-lined room. He turned there as if leaving a stage before the opera's tragic ending. "I'll tell him," he said with an expression of sadness on his face. "Goodbye . . ."

THE ULTIMATE BUMMER

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Dressed for an evening on the town, Sam Corbin stood between pool table and dart board in the games room of the family mansion. He was waiting impatiently for his son to complete his shot. Peter Corbin thrust the cue forward—the white ball was driven into the nine ball, which crashed into the corner pocket with a noise like a rifle going off. Or a coffin lid slamming shut.

"Now," the old man said, "tell me what you want from me. I don't like to keep Philomena waiting."

"I need money, Father."

"Has the company stopped paying you?"

Peter was a paper pusher at Corbin Processed Foods. The job had become more stressful since Sam Corbin sold the firm six months ago. Peter's days were probably numbered now that he had to survive without Daddy's protection. "I'm not talking about wages."

"What, then?"

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"I have an opportunity to buy into Titanic Games. They made this pool table. They outfit bowling lanes. I can acquire a substantial interest." The deal would open up a new world for Peter. He'd be able to fraternize with his heroes, the professional pool players. A talented amateur, Peter didn't have the fortitude to become a pro. But Titanic sponsored the professional tour. As a major shareholder, he could hang around and be somebody.

"How much are we talking about?"

"A million. Three million would be better, but with one I can finance the rest."

The old man, sharp and limber at seventy, came to the table. Long, strong hands reached out from tuxedo sleeves and shifted a couple of balls randomly. He waited for a reaction.

Peter ignored the interference. "You can afford to back me. You've got the cash since you sold the firm."

"When I'm gone, you'll have it all."

Peter was worried that Philomena Tate, given time, might gain control of the old man's estate. "I need it now!"

"Patience, son. I've never been able to teach you to have patience."

As a child, when his mother was alive, Peter had fun. His father was benign in those days. Easter, for example, was a time of joy. Chocolate eggs were hidden through the house and, directly after breakfast, the little boy would search room by room, upstairs and down, filling a hat with the foil-wrapped goodies.

Then Sylvia Becker Corbin, who looked like a movie star, died prematurely and without warning. And Sam Corbin was never the same. He managed to hide most of his anger. But it came out in his dealings with the boy. Withholding became the name of the game. Postponement. Never enjoy this morning what can be put off until this afternoon.

The annual Easter Egg hunt was retained. But it took place later rather than sooner. "May I begin searching now, Father?"

"Not yet. I'll tell you when."

One year it had gone dark outside before he was turned loose. From then on, Peter stopped asking. He looked for other games to play, such as 9-ball. While his father, avoiding another commitment that might hurt him, began a lifelong series of dalliances.

Chalking the tip of his cue, Peter said, "There's a time limit on this opportunity with Titanic." But Sam was gone up the stairs and out of the games room, patent-leather pumps flashing like a couple of giant grasshoppers . . .

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Across town in his showbiz restaurant, Nathan Paradiso got the ball rolling. Frequently it took a song from the owner to break the ice at Nathan's Bar and Grill. "This is for Sam and Philomena," he announced. He began to sing "People Will Say We're in Love" in a semi-operatic baritone voice.

"I wish he wouldn't do that," Philomena Tate complained. She had plans for Sam. But they did not include love or marriage.

"Nathan likes us."

"Nathan has a problem. And it isn't with me."

The baseball season was over, but Philomena still had a tan from touring as manager with the Metrola Maids. They were the best women's team in the country. From April to September, the Maids bused from town to town, beating the local all-stars.

"You'd better tell me what he told you." Corbin joined in the applause at the end of Nathan's song.

"Pay the senator, Sam. That's the message. Nathan is a good friend of the senator. And he thinks you should pay him what you promised."

Corbin's head was large and shiny, with a sparse thatch of ragged sandy hair. It looked something like a wooden post that has been pounded fuzzy with a sledgehammer.

"Nothing was promised."

"You paid him before."

"Because I was in business. He was able to do me favors. We go back a long way."

At the beginning of World War II, Sam Corbin anticipated the need for processed foods. He developed a method for dehydrating potatoes. He set up a plant and, with government contracts, supplied more than one Army. And made a fortune. After the war, the company branched out into producing more sophisticated dried and frozen foods. The senator was of assistance when some regulation got in the way of efficient business procedures. And Sam Corbin always fed the senator's kitty.

"But I'm retired now," Corbin continued. "He can't help me any more. Why should I go on paying him?"

"Nathan told me you promised the senator a cut from the proceeds when you sold the company."

"I recall no such promise." A rotund customer was on his feet rendering "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep." "Or if I made it," Sam said, "I've changed my mind."

Philomena frowned. "Sorry to eat and run."

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"You're angry at me."

"Not true. I care about you, and I'm worried about something happening to you."

"If it does, you'll be rich."

"Shut up, Sam. I hate that." Weeks ago, the old man had mentioned she was now included in his will. At the time, she couldn't avoid thinking about the financial needs of the Metrola Maids. The team's corporate sponsor was becoming stingy. The girls could use a new bus, better uniforms. Maybe she should get over her shyness and petition Corbin to donate a lump sum. The idea made her squirm. She wanted the money but didn't want to ask for it.

Philomena picked up her purse. "I've got some work to do over at the newspaper." In the off-season, she wrote a column for the *Metrola Messenger*.

"Can't it wait? I wanted to take you dancing." Corbin snapped his fingers close to one ear. "Get out there and torch the floor with my lambada."

She couldn't help laughing. "How do you even know about the lambada?"

"No big deal," the old man said. "It's what Bracia and Tybee used to do on the *Ed Sullivan Show*."

For Nathan Paradiso to visit the Corbin residence was a most unusual event. Mrs. Helmsley, the live-in domestic, set aside the vacuum cleaner and led the way to her employer. Sam welcomed the club-owner into the library, where he had been reading a book beside a fire of maple slabs. The old man was immaculate in striped trousers, gleaming maroon-leather slippers, and a matching velvet jacket. His eyes peered alertly from the clean-shaven face. While Mrs. Helmsley waited, he asked his visitor, "Coffee? Something stronger?"

Paradiso winced and shook his head. "Couldn't handle it." He clapped both hands against his torso like a man about to move a refrigerator. "Too many years in the restaurant business."

When they were alone, Corbin said, "You want me to pay the senator."

"You promised the man."

"Changed my mind."

"I'm here to change it back."

"Save your breath to sing Pagliacci."

"I'd rather save your life."

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"Is this a threat?"

"Absolutely. The senator has friends of every persuasion. Businessmen like you. But from the other economy. They all owe him favors."

Sam Corbin turned his face to the fire. "So if I don't give that avaricious politico a share of the proceeds from the sale of my business, he intends to order a hit."

"Sooner rather than later," Paradiso confirmed. "And he wants your answer now."

Corbin looked up. "Tell the man I refuse to pay."

Paradiso went to the doorway of the book-lined room. He turned there as if leaving a stage before the opera's tragic ending. "I'll tell him," he said with an expression of sadness on his face. "Goodbye."

Peter hurried into the room scant moments after the departure of the restaurant owner. "I wasn't eavesdropping, Father."

"Yes, you were."

"Did he mean what he said?"

"I believe he believes he was meant to mean it."

"Then there's a contract out on your life."

"And wouldn't you love it? Inheriting the estate, buying into your billiard-supply company. Getting to hang around with the stars." Corbin looked at his son with genuine curiosity. "Why don't you come up out of that stuffy room? There's more to life than ivory balls."

"Stop trying to control me."

"Is there a woman in your life, son?"

Peter turned away. "Enough of them in yours for both of us. And enough alcohol." The younger Corbin had abstained all his life.

"I'd give a year," the old man said, "if you'd go into a bar, have three stiff drinks, and take the girl on the next stool home to her apartment."

Peter stared at his father. "From what I overheard," he said, "you may not have a year left to give."

One week later, Mrs. Helmsley found Sam Corbin dead across the dining-room table when she was doing her Saturday-morning cleaning. She surveyed the scene—the table set for two, the overturned glass, the soiled linen napkin. She knew enough not to touch anything. She ran downstairs to the kitchen and, breathing hard through turned-up nostrils, dialed 911.

Detective-Sergeant Sid Gelfand fielded the call. He drove to the

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big house on Metrola's affluent north side. Several uniformed officers were on the scene. The medical examiner arrived and began to inspect the body. The deceased's son was hovering—Gelfand said he'd talk to him in a few minutes.

The detective was a believer in the importance of first impressions. There is purity in a murder scene—before any questions have been asked, before biased opinions have been offered. The truth is here. The killer has departed, but an echo remains, a resonance. Gelfand carried with him a mystical faith in the theory that it should be possible to solve any crime instantaneously. He had never managed to do it, but he had come close on more than one occasion.

"Not much blood," he said to the medical examiner.

The M.E. indicated the back of the victim's neck. "Small puncture wound here. An icepick could have done it."

"*Molto mafioso.*" Gelfand looked closely at the linen napkin. "Looks as if this was used to wipe the weapon clean." He bagged the napkin and tagged it for the lab.

"The time of death was roughly ten o'clock last night," the M.E. said, "give or take an hour."

Gelfand bent his lanky body, leaning over the table to inspect twin cups of cold coffee, a balloon glass on its side, the contents spilled and dried on the white tablecloth. A bottle stood open. The detective inspected the label—cognac. Leaving everything for the printman, he went to stand in the doorway for a few minutes, watching the investigating team, letting his instincts work.

In the kitchen, he found Mrs. Helmsley weeping into a sink full of dishwater. She dried her hands and eyes as she told him how she had discovered the body. "He was dining late last night. I prepared the meal ahead of time."

"Who was the guest?"

"Miss Tate—the lady he's been seeing for the past few months. They met in some saloon. He was proud of her and fond of her."

"Do you live here?"

"I have a suite on the top floor."

"Did you hear anything out of the ordinary last night?"

"They had an argument. It didn't last long."

"Could you tell what it was about?"

"No. But she was doing most of the yelling."

Gelfand couldn't imagine this old dear attacking her employer

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with an icepick. He concluded the brief interview by asking, "Do you know of anybody who would have wanted to kill Mr. Corbin?"

"No, I don't."

"What about the son?"

"Peter? All he ever wanted was his father's love. What would be the good of killing him?"

Gelfand roamed the ground floor until he found his way down into a room off the dining room furnished with tall upholstered chairs and an elegant pool table. Peter Corbin was at the table, playing alone. In his school days, Gelfand had made a few dollars shooting 9-ball. Unexpectedly, his heart began to pound.

"We can have that chat now," he said, descending three carpeted steps into the dimly lit room. Shaded light was focused on the green-baize surface of the table.

"Mind if I keep on shooting?" Peter said, smiling.

"Mind if I take a cue?"

The detective removed his dark-blue jacket and slung it on a hook. Red suspenders held cream-colored trousers waist high over a black-nylon shirt. As he selected a cue from the rack, he loosened the knot of his narrow crimson tie.

Peter laughed. "You look like a hustler," he said.

"Takes one to know one," Gelfand said. Without asking permission, he drove the cue ball into the triangle of numbered balls Corbin had just finished racking. They rolled in all directions, two of them falling into pockets. He lined up his next shot. "Three in the side." It wasn't an easy cut. He stroked the cue ball smoothly. It imparted a gentle kiss to the three ball, which rolled to the rim of the pocket and dropped out of sight.

Gelfand had moved to his next position before it fell. "What happened last night?" he asked.

"I arrived home just after ten. As I was coming in, I passed Philomena Tate on the way out with her companion."

"She had somebody with her? Seven ball in the corner." Click, bang, the ball was gone.

"Short man, dark hair. I never saw him before. He looked dangerous."

"Meaning what?"

"My father was being threatened. Something to do with refusing to pay off a politician. I don't have details. But I believe someone had put out a contract."

"Where can I confirm that?"

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"Try Nathan Paradiso. The restaurant owner."

Gelfand chalked his cue. "Tell me about Miss Tate. Five ball, twice across."

"Father met her someplace. He hangs out in bars. Philomena manages the Metrola Maids."

Gelfand was impressed. "Where am I likely to find her now?"

"Call the *Messenger* offices. She writes a column."

"Nine ball straight in." Gelfand drove it home.

As the detective stacked his cue in the rack and slipped into his jacket, Peter said, "We must play again."

"For money," the detective told him as he trotted up the stairs. "And you and I will need at least one more conversation."

"Peter said what?" Philomena turned from the word processor, where she had been composing her weekend column. The lanky detective in the flamboyant shirt and tie was asking questions about Sam Corbin's last supper.

"He said you had somebody with you when you left the house last night. Short man, dark hair."

"Peter's lying through his teeth. Sam and I dined alone. We argued, I'll admit that. Same old hassle we've been having. So I left early. By myself."

"Hassle about what?"

"Sam was supposed to hand over a cash payment to a certain senator from the sale of his business. Do I have to name a name?"

The detective knew who she was talking about. "That's not my department," he said. "I want to find out who put the icepick in the back of Corbin's neck."

The journalist made a face. "I can't believe they actually did that."

"They?"

"Try to understand. There was nobody with me last night. But I'd been told the mafia would come after him." Philomena pressed the Save button and the text she had written began transferring to a floppy disc. As the machine beeped and buzzed, she got to her feet and moved to the window. She could see one half of the neon sign outside Nathan's Bar and Grill on the next street. "The senator is a friend of Nathan Paradiso," she said.

"That's common knowledge."

"Nathan asked me to warn Sam that dangerous people might hurt him if he went on refusing to pay the senator."

"Is that why you were yelling at him last night?"

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The question sank in. "You've been talking to Mrs. Helmsley. Yes, I yelled. His idea of survival was to leave town. As if they'd just forget about him. And he wanted me to go with him."

"Did you love Sam Corbin?" Gelfand asked.

She had to think about it. "We had good times together. He knew how to have fun."

"I suppose that answers my question."

"He telephoned and left funny messages on my machine. He made me laugh."

The bar was not yet open at ten o'clock on Saturday morning, but someone was playing the piano. Sid Gelfand made his way between tables. Nathan Paradiso saw him coming and flashed a grin. The men had crossed paths before, but never in the detective's official capacity. Gelfand selected a chair and sat on it backward, folding his arms across the bentwood frame. Paradiso's left hand was repeating a staccato bass figure while the right hand sprinkled a cheerful melody on top. Gelfand found his spirits rising. It was as if he'd swallowed a stimulant.

The club owner finished playing. "Pinetop's Boogie," he said. He got up and came around the piano, wheeling the stool in front of him. He sat down facing the detective with his fists on his knees. "Philomena phoned. She said you were on your way."

"Saves a lot of preamble."

"I admit I was putting pressure on Sam Corbin. The senator only wanted what was promised him."

"But Corbin refused to pay."

"And sooner or later they were going to come after him." Paradiso shrugged.

"The son tells me he saw a man leaving the house on the night of the murder. Along with Miss Tate."

"It's possible. But I'm only a messenger. I don't know who the man could have been." The club owner's face was serious. "As God is my witness."

"Are you religious, Nathan?"

"Certainly," he said. "If there were no God, we would never have been given Art Tatum."

Two days later, Detective-Sergeant Gelfand was on duty at the precinct house. The forensic report from the Corbin case was on his desk. There was only one surprise, for what it was worth. The lab

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had discovered clinging to Sam Corbin's table napkin a tiny fragment of cork. Apart from that, there was a smear of dried blood and a spill of cognac. The blood was the same type as the victim's. Cause of death was, indeed, the puncture wound in the back of the neck. Gelfand could imagine the killer wiping the bloody icepick on the napkin before fleeing the scene of the crime.

In company with Philomena Tate?

Gelfand dialed the number of the *Metrola Messenger* and was connected with Miss Tate's office. "I'd like you to meet me at the Corbin residence," he said.

"Are you making progress?"

"I have more information."

"I'm getting ready to go and have some publicity photos taken with a few of my ballplayers."

"This won't take long," Gelfand said.

They were repairing streets in downtown Metrola and Gelfand had to go the long way around. His revised route to the affluent suburb took him past the *Messenger* office building. Forced to wait at a traffic light, he turned his head. Philomena Tate was on the sidewalk, and she was not alone.

The man with her was short and had dark hair. They were arguing. She had money in one hand and, shaking her head in his face, she stuffed the cash in his breast pocket.

The light changed and Gelfand had to move on. As he drove to the mansion, he sifted through the facts of the case. There had been only Peter's word against Philomena's as to the existence of the mysterious dark-haired man. The icepick wound in the back of the neck resembled a professional hit. Cognac had been spilled, perhaps during the attack. The lab report identified a fragment of cork on the napkin, possibly connected with the smear of Corbin's blood.

In his mind's eye, Gelfand saw the cognac bottle standing open on the table. He focused on it.

Mrs. Helmsley answered the door and let him in.

"He's in the games room," she said with a mixture of patience and disapproval.

As he headed downstairs, Gelfand said, "Miss Tate should be here soon. Please tell her where I am."

The detective made his way to the shadowy room. The only sound was the rustle of newsprint as Peter Corbin turned a page of the paper spread open on the table under the shaded light. He glanced

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up as Gelfand arrived at his side. They stared at the business section together.

"How's the market?"

"You may as well know," Peter said. "You'll find out soon enough. I'm buying into Titanic Games."

"You can afford to."

"I don't hire hitmen. That's what Paradiso's friends do."

Gelfand turned a page of the newspaper. "Mrs. Helmsley suggests you and your father didn't get along."

"That wasn't my fault. He made the rules." Peter inclined his head. He was hearing the sound of a boy's footsteps running eagerly from room to room. He could see colored foil on Easter eggs. "We used to have fun around here."

"I spoke to Philomena Tate. She insists she was alone that night."

"She would, wouldn't she? But I saw the man."

Gelfand had seen him, too. But there was another clue he wanted to investigate before Philomena arrived and he quizzed her about her companion.

"The lab found something on your father's napkin. A tiny fragment of cork."

"He must have hated that. Dad always wanted everything to be perfect. Cork in his cognac must have been the ultimate bummer."

"There's a problem," Gelfand said. "I clearly remember the bottle on the table. It wasn't the leading brand of cognac by any means. Apparently booze was booze to your father."

"So?"

"If you were a drinking man, you'd know this. The bottle had a screw cap. There *was* no cork. So the cork on the napkin must have come from somewhere else."

"Where?"

"I've been thinking about that. And it's all coming together." The detective picked up a dart from one of several on a table. He looked at the dart board on the wall ten feet away and threw the dart. "You killed your father with a dart," he said.

Peter remained silent.

"Your motive was the money, obviously. You wanted to buy into the games company. You came home Friday night as Philomena was leaving. The dark-haired man with her had nothing to do with the murder. But you improvised."

"As you're doing now."

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"You used him in your alibi. Because you knew your father was being threatened. So you decided to fake a mafia hit."

"All *very* hypothetical, Sergeant."

"Not when the lab gets through." Gelfand approached the board and plucked out the dart he'd thrown. He touched the cork surface, then rubbed thumb and forefinger together. "Why is this sticky?"

Peter shrugged. "Rubber cement. Sometimes I put up a picture of the old man as a target."

"That's worth knowing." Gelfand closed his eyes. "You stood behind your father at the table. He was drunk, inattentive. You had plenty of time to position the dart above his collar and thrust it home. Then you drew it out and wiped it clean of blood on the napkin. Not noticing the fragment of cork on the metal spike of the dart near the shaft. Held there by the rubber cement."

He used the dart point to prize a small amount of cork from the board. "The lab will compare this with the fragment they have—" He turned. He was alone. He sprinted up the steps and ran down the corridor.

Entering the reception room, he was just in time to see the front door swinging shut. Within seconds, he was on the sidewalk outside the building. Here he saw Peter Corbin running down the street past the Metrola Maids team bus parked at the curb. Philomena Tate and several of her players were getting out.

"Stop him!" Gelfand yelled. He pointed at the retreating figure of Peter Corbin. He didn't want to fire his gun on a public thoroughfare.

Philomena turned to a lanky girl with blonde hair exploding from beneath a blue peaked cap. "Bring him down, Rebecca," she ordered.

Rebecca took a baseball from the pocket of her satin windbreaker. She reared back and let fly. The ball sizzled as it covered the shortest distance between her extended hand and Peter Corbin's head. The sound was that of a coconut dropping from a tall tree. His legs buckled and he hit the pavement.

"Rebecca's my third-base person," Philomena said with pride. "That was the long throw to first from shallow left field."

When Peter was in handcuffs and lying prone on the back seat of the bus waiting for the police ambulance, Gelfand told Philomena, "The case is solved. But I can't figure out why you lied."

"I never did."

"You said there was no dark-haired man with you on the night of the murder."

"I was alone!"

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"But I saw him with you half an hour ago. Outside the Messenger building when I drove by. The two of you were arguing and I saw you pay him off."

Philomena gave Gelfand one of the looks she reserved for umpires on arguable third strikes. "That was Vito, the driver of our team bus," she said. "He's a scofflaw. He's trying to ignore another parking ticket. I gave him the money and told him to pay it."

Gelfand had given zero attention to the man behind the wheel. On the way out of the bus, he measured him with a penetrating glance. "So I collect parking tickets," Vito grumbled. "Stop looking at me like I killed somebody."

The jury convicted Peter Corbin of first-degree murder and he was sentenced to life in prison. Sid Gelfand was in the courtroom on that final day. The men came face to face as the prisoner was being led away.

"Looks like you and I will never have that game of 9-ball," Corbin said.

"I won't say I'm sorry because I'm not," Gelfand told him.

"It gets worse," Peter said morosely. "The facility where they'll be keeping me has no pool table."

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Yet another Department of First Stories author introduced to us by Professor Craig Kee Strete of San Jose State University is Greg Hinze—a student in one of Professor Strete's fiction classes, a seventy-four-year-old retired IBM engineer and, according to his teacher, "far and away the best-loved student among many at SJSU."

The very opposite, one would conclude, of a bad example . . .

A BAD EXAMPLE

by GREG HINZE

My feet sink into the deep-pile carpet as I stand in front of the polished desk. The old man glares at me with his harsh, staring, venomous eyes. When he summons me to his executive office, I know it's no social call. This is official business.

The old man is a skinny little guy with the skin drawn so tight on his face that he looks like a skeleton. When he speaks, he raps his fingertips on the desk for emphasis. His froglike voice is a whispered rasp.

"A guy in San Francisco owes the Organization a half million bucks and he won't pay. Two of the boys from San Francisco were sent to collect. They were found floating in the Bay with the backs of their heads blown off. The Organization can't let a welsher get away with that. It would set a bad example."

"Yes, sir."

"They wanted me to send my best man, Joe Schultz, but I have him working here on a job for me, so I'm sending you instead."

"Yes, sir."

"Kill him."

"Yes, sir."

"This time, don't bungle the job."

"No, sir."

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"Wear this black-leather jacket," he says. "When you arrive, put this Chicago sticker on your chest and go out front. A cab driver will find you and take you to a motorcycle in the airport garage. He'll give you the keys. In the saddlebags you'll find a loaded automatic with silencer, a map of San Francisco, and an address. Your five grand will be in an envelope, like always. I'll give you another five g's when you get back."

"Yes, sir."

"Every Saturday morning, like clockwork, this guy leaves the house of his mistress at exactly eight A.M. You be at the door when he opens it. After you shoot him, throw the gun in the Bay."

"Where do I hide out?"

"Here's the address of a safe house in Sausalito. You cross the Gate Bridge to get there. Hide the motorcycle in the storage shed and lie low for a few days. Your tickets are made out to Harry Smith. Now get the hell out of here, and don't fail me!"

I catch the plane for Frisco and sneak a straight shot from my hip flask. My grandfather was in the Russian Army and my father was a New York cop. He'd been so good at collecting graft that the Organization made him a better offer. He'd been killed offering protection to a gun shop.

They both would be proud of me now. I've risen to the top of my profession. I'm Igor Gabrilowich, one of the hitmen for the Chicago branch of the Organization.

Unfortunately, I've been unlucky at times. Last year I was told to hit a labor leader as he got on the plane in Hawaii. Could I help it if my rental car ran out of gas? I got to the airport just in time to wave goodbye. That's why the lecture before.

At the San Francisco airport, the cab driver nods at my Chicago sticker and says, "Follow me." He takes me to the motorcycle and says, "Don't goof up on this one, kid. This is your last chance."

No problem, everything goes like clockwork. I find the street on the map and mark the escape route through the city to the Gate Bridge. I keep repeating the address to myself—823 Nineteenth Avenue.

I'm surprised when I reach the place. The guy must be rich to keep his mistress in a mansion like this. I go up the front steps at one minute to eight. Just as I reach the door, it swings open. There he is, a tall distinguished-looking man in a business suit. He has

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a surprised look on his face when he sees me. I whip the gun out and plug him between the eyes.

His eyes take on a startled stare and his mouth opens as if to yell, but nothing comes out but a gurgle. He falls back inside the house and I get the hell away.

When I reach the middle of the bridge, I fling the gun over the rail without stopping. The water's bound to be deep there. I go to my safe house and call Chicago.

"The package has been delivered to 823," I say.

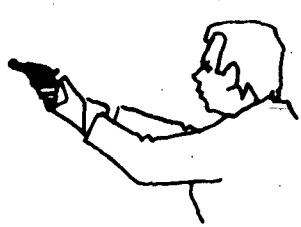
"Good, I knew you could find it," the boss says and hangs up.

The next morning, I pick up a copy of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. PROMINENT SAN FRANCISCO ATTORNEY SHOT, says the headline. "He had no known enemies," says the article. I feel uneasy about the whole thing. I get out the instruction sheet for another look. 823 Nineteenth Street, it says. I went to 823 Nineteenth Avenue! I killed the wrong guy!

When my intended victim sees that 823 Nineteenth Avenue address in the paper, he'll know right away that hit was meant for him. I'll never find him now, but he'll find me—and so will my boss.

As if that's not bad enough, the second section of the paper has more news for me. GUN DROPPED FROM GATE BRIDGE ALMOST KILLS OFFICER ON COAST GUARD CUTTER. The article goes on to quote FBI agent Ernest Getcherman. "According to FBI sources, fingerprints on the gun were traced to a Chicago hood by the name of Igor Gabrilowich. The FBI is looking for him."

I wonder how long I can live in Argentina on five thousand bucks.



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a *NEW* short story by

CLARK HOWARD

"I understand, of course, that you are here to burn a section of the rain forest," Mundo said. "But to bring a man all the way from the U.S. just for that makes no sense to me. Even I, a humble foreman, can strike a match and start a fire."

"I'm not here just to start a fire," Jordan replied. "I'm here to control a fire. I'm an agnitechnist. A fire expert. 'Agni' is the ancient word for fire."

As usual, a story from Clark Howard full of rich, authentic detail and emotion, a timely subject, and a hard-bitten protagonist with hard choices to make . . .

WHILE THE RAIN FOREST BURNED

by CLARK HOWARD

When Jordan passed through the Immigration barriers into the airport terminal at Porto Velho, he saw a handsome Brazilian about his own age, thirty-three, in khakis, holding a hand-lettered sign with his name on it.

"I'm Jordan," he said, walking up to the man.

"Raymond Mundo, senor," the man introduced himself, nodding his chin an inch. "Welcome to the Mato Grosso. I am the foreman for Senor Alves. I have transportation outside."

Jordan slung his duffel bag and followed Mundo out into a thickly hot, wet, glaringly bright afternoon. A swarm of sidewalk vendors converged on Jordan as soon as they saw his white face, but several sharp commands from Mundo, in four languages, drove them away.

"Why do you tell them in so many languages?" Jordan asked.

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"In the Mato Grosso, one never knows which tongue to use," Mundo replied. "Portuguese is the national language, Spanish has seeped in from Brazil's neighbors at every border, English has come from the priests and nuns that the church sent, and the engineers and teachers from the Peace Corps—and the Indians infuse it all with their own dialect, which they stubbornly cling to even in the face of the government's efforts to educate them. So if one wishes to be obeyed here, it is wise to be certain that one is understood." Mundo glanced smugly at him. "I suppose you will require an interpreter while you are here?"

Jordan shook his head. "I speak nine languages—Portuguese and Spanish among them."

"My compliments," Mundo said. But his expression soured a hint.

In the parking lot was an open-sided Jeep with a canvas canopy to keep out the sun. The name ALVES and the face of an angry bull were painted on the spare-tire cover. Jordan tossed his duffel bag into the rear, draped his windbreaker over it, and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt, which was already darkening in places as the oppressive humidity assaulted his body.

Mundo drove off the lot and headed south out of Porto Velho on BR-364, one of the newly paved roads that jutted off the Trans-Amazon Highway toward Bolivia. Even though the road was fairly new, the asphalt was already cracked and pocked in places because it wasn't solid enough to accommodate heavy equipment; local officials who were supposed to control its traffic accepted bribes instead. The road improved some fifty kilometers south of the city—not many heavy trucks had occasion to travel that far.

As the Jeep went farther south, the terrain on both sides of the road became thicker, greener, more formidable, less inviting, perhaps even threatening. At one point, Jordan saw Mundo reach under his driver's seat and pull out a cartridge belt with a holstered revolver attached. He placed it next to his right thigh, patting it silently as if it were a pet. Jordan said nothing.

"It will be a two-hour trip to the village of Jaru," Mundo said early in the drive, speaking now in Portuguese. "The ranch of Senor Alves is only a short distance farther." He smiled proudly. "It is a magnificent place, senor, as you will see. Thirty rooms in the main house. Everything made of the finest wood and tile and marble—you are in for a real treat, senor, believe me."

Jordan merely nodded. The foreman, he sensed, was testing him on his languages. But Jordan didn't intend to play idle games with

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him. If Mundo wanted to see how well Jordan spoke Portugee, he would have to ask a direct question.

He did that after about an hour. "Tell me, senor, exactly what is it that you do?" he inquired curiously, with exaggerated politeness. "I understand, of course, that you are here to burn a section of the rain forest. But to bring a man all the way from the U.S. just for that makes no sense to me. Even I, a humble foreman, can strike a match and start a fire."

"I'm not here just to start a fire," Jordan replied in precise, textbook Portuguese, "I'm here to *control* a fire. I'm an agnitechnist. A fire expert. 'Agni' is the ancient word for fire."

"I see," said Mundo. He forced a smile. "Thank you for the information, senor. It is always good to learn something new."

Jordan looked out at the passing forest and said nothing further. Some men, he knew, sought to be offended in order to defend what they were, to defend their place, their reason for being. Apparently Mundo was such a man. Jordan hoped he wouldn't have to work too closely with him. That type liked to see other men fail.

As they neared the outskirts of the village of Jaru, Jordan began to see signs of humanity again. Small clearings appeared, on which stood pitifully poor little farmhouses beside meager crops of beans and corn and tomatoes, most of them stunted in the nutrient-poor soil that could support the most fecund rain forest but was stubbornly resistant to agriculture. Along the road, too, could be seen other signatures of man: carelessly tossed bottles and other trash, an occasional blown-out tire, wandering chickens pecking at the ground for a stray seed. The Jeep sped past a dilapidated country store with a single ancient gasoline pump and a rusted Coca-Cola sign over the door. Boys using sticks prodded scrawny goats somewhere to be milked. Two nuns, both white, in traditional habits despite the heat, walked side by side without speaking. Jordan observed everything without comment.

Presently the Jeep overtook a brown woman in a shapeless, colorless dress hurrying along their side of the road, carrying in her arms a small child who had a bloody foot. As the Jeep sped past, she turned pleading eyes toward them.

"Pull over," Jordan said.

"She's only a Nambi," Mundo told him.

"Pull over," Jordan said again, the simple request becoming at once an order. In a single motion, Mundo glanced at him, saw a

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clear danger in his eyes, and guided the Jeep to a stop at the side of the road.

Jordan got out and the woman ran to him with the child. "My daughter stepped on broken glass," she panted in broken Portuguese. "I cannot stop the bleeding!"

Jordan snatched his windbreaker from the Jeep and lay the girl on it on the ground. She was about four, wimpering and shivering. "Hold the leg like this—" Jordan instructed the woman, elevating the child's bleeding foot. Unzipping his duffel bag, he found a clean pair of thick boot socks and pressed them to a three-inch gash on the instep of the child's foot, which was gushing blood. "Hold this," he said. "Tight—very tight." To everything he said, the anxious woman replied, "Yes, yes—"

Searching in his duffel again, Jordan removed a metal first-aid box and opened it on the Jeep's fender. Across the hood of the vehicle, he saw Mundo get out and buckle on his gunbelt. It didn't bother Jordan: he was too important to Mundo's employer for Mundo to let anything happen to him.

From the first-aid kit, Jordan took a small plastic bottle of iodine and a roll of gauze. Kneeling next to the child, he opened the bottle of iodine and said to the woman, "This will hurt her, but it's necessary."

"Yes—yes—"

"Hold her." Jordan took away the now blood-soaked boot socks and poured iodine into the cut. The little girl screamed and kicked Jordan with her other foot and tried to pull away from her mother. The woman held her firmly and kept up a stream of words meant to be comforting, though they could barely be heard over the child's painful protest. Jordan folded a thick square of gauze and bound it in place over the wound. "Where were you taking her?" he asked.

"In Jaru there is an infirmary—"

Wrapping the girl in his windbreaker, Jordan put her into her mother's arms and said, "Get in the Jeep."

The woman's eyes flicked to the name and the drawing of the bull's face, then to Mundo standing in the road in his gunbelt, and her eyes widened in fear. "No, please, we will walk now. It is not far and the bleeding has almost stopped—"

"No, get in the Jeep," Jordan insisted. Taking her by the shoulders, he guided her into the back seat. Mundo glared at both of them. Jordan got into the passenger seat and glared back at him. After a

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moment, the Brazilian, tight-lipped, slipped behind the wheel and pulled back onto the road, heading toward the village.

Senor Alves was a stocky, white-haired man. He sat at the head of his extravagantly laid dinner table dressed in an exquisite handmade silk *guayaberra* shirt, holding a silver-stemmed crystal goblet in a hand laden with three solid-gold rings. Raising the goblet, he smiled at Jordan and said, "To your good health, senor, and to the successful completion of your work here."

Jordan nodded and took a sip of wine. At the other end of the table, Raymond Mundo also drank, as did a fourth man seated across from Jordan, a Japanese named Tonada who had been introduced as an "advisor" from a Tokyo trading company. Exactly what kind of advice he provided had not been explained.

"My man Mundo told me of your Good Samaritan act on the road today," Alves said, still smiling. "I commend you, senor. To see a child suffering is a sad thing. Even a Nambi child."

"Nambi?" Jordan inquired. It was the same term Mundo had used.

"For Nambiquara," Alves explained. "They are the Indians who live hereabouts—most of them in the rain forest, thank goodness. But some of them in and around the village also. They're a troublesome lot—they resist progress, resist modernization of the rain forest, resist the government's efforts to educate them. They are much like what I have read of your own American Indians, senor."

"Was the rain forest theirs before it was yours?" Jordan asked. His tone was neutral but the question was not. Tonada, the Japanese, recognized this at once—his thin lips shifted into the barest of smiles, totally without humor.

"I beg your pardon?" Alves asked, frowning.

"In my country," Jordan said, "the land belonged originally to the Indians. It was taken from them by various means: legislation, theft, armed force. Was it the same with your Indians here?"

Something flashed in Alves' eyes: resentment, irritation—and something stronger. "Senor Jordan," he said, pronouncing it Hor*dan*, "my grandfather and his brothers, my grand-uncles, came to the Mato Grosso when there were no roads, no villages, not even any maps. They came because their government, like your government, declared the land open for settlement. They faced many hazards, many obstacles, to claim and settle a part of what was then an unexplored and almost totally unproductive jungle. Only one thing came from the rain forest in the old days: *aguaje*—a palm fruit. The

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Nambi, what is left of them, still grow and harvest it exclusively today, stubbornly ignoring all other industry. But *my* ancestors, senor, *my* family, opened up this territory to much more than a simple jungle fruit: they opened it to vast mineral deposits— manganese, bauxite, copper, many others—and they opened it to extensive cattle ranching, including our own. And in an area where cattle feed cannot be grown, my family has overcome the lack of grain production by developing, through our friends in other countries—" he gestured toward Tonada "—synthetic and chemical feed for our herds. We brought this rain forest out of the stone age, senor—not by theft or by force, but through legal settlement."

"I didn't mean to suggest otherwise," Jordan stated without apology. "I was merely curious about the history of the rain forest."

Tonada's smile widened without warming. "I think I detect a streak of humanitarianism in your guest, Senor Alves," he said. His calculating eyes challenged Jordan. "Are you a friend of mankind, Mr. Jordan? One of those good people who feels he has to lend a hand to the downtrodden at every opportunity?"

"I've never really given it much thought," Jordan replied. "I do what I feel I must at the time."

"It would be odd if you *did* consider yourself a humanitarian," Tonada suggested, "given the fact that calculated destruction is your profession."

"I prefer to think of it as creative destruction," Jordan corrected, "in order to accomplish something better. For instance, every year I'm hired to burn the sugar-cane fields in Hawaii. It is necessary in order to harvest the crop. And every year I burn out the scrub brush on the Zambian plains to produce grasslands. For Senor Alves—" he gestured toward his host "—I will burn part of the rain forest, and from that destruction will come a larger, greater cattle ranch."

Alves smiled broadly. "Well said, senor! You will do well here." He rose and his guests immediately did likewise. "Come, let us have brandy in my study. We can look at the map and I will show you what needs to be burned."

The map, in relief, covered a full wall of the rancher's richly furnished study. Lighted all the way around, hand-drawn, beautifully lettered, it was a work of art as well as a geographic chart. A length of red twine had been pinned to it in the shape of a square.

"That is the area, senor," said Alves, pointing. "The main house,

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where we are, is here. The ranch itself extends from here—" his finger swept "—to here. The access roads are here, here, and here."

"I will need to tour the entire area," Jordan said, studying the map.

"My man Mundo is at your service."

"What time is daybreak?" Jordan asked Mundo. "I must see the trees very early to test their moisture content."

"If we leave at four-thirty," Mundo said, "we can be in the area at first light."

Jordan turned to Alves again. "Do you have adequate labor to dig firebreaks—perhaps a hundred men?"

"There are many unemployed miners in the Grande Carajas, a mining area a few hundred kilometers to the east. We can have them here in two days."

"Where is the nearest chemicals manufacturer?"

"In Manaus," said Alves. "I can have whatever you need flown to Porto Velho in one day."

"How much time do you need to evacuate people living in the area to be burned?" Jordan asked.

Alves shrugged. "That is not a consideration. Only the Nambi live in the rain forest. They will evacuate themselves when they smell the smoke."

"Where will they go?"

"Into another part of the forest."

Jordan fell silent and looked away to cover his uneasiness. He stared at a display of exquisitely hand-tooled shotguns on an adjacent wall. His mind pitched. Burning a place where people still lived was new to him.

"Our agnitechnist is feeling his conscience again," said Tonada, as he worked a cigarette into a pearl-inlaid holder. Lighting it, he held the lighter with its ellipse of flame in front of him and stared at it for a suspended moment. "Perhaps I understand how you feel, Mr. Jordan," he said when he finally extinguished the flame. "As a boy, I endured the firestorms caused by your country's incendiary bombing of Japan. I don't imagine many Americans remember, but before you dropped the atom bomb on us, you had destroyed sixty-five of our cities by fire-bombing. In Tokyo alone, you destroyed seven square miles and killed eighty-four thousand people in one six-hour raid. That is more people than died at Hiroshima. Were you aware of that, Mr. Jordan?"

Jordan shook his head. "Before my time," he said offhandedly.

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"Ah," the Japanese nodded. "I thought perhaps you were a student of fires."

"The only ones I study are the ones I start." Jordan turned to his host. "I must excuse myself now, Senor Alves, to see to my instruments and material for the early start tomorrow."

None of the men offered to shake hands with him before he left the room.

For the next few days, Jordan inspected the condemned area of the rain forest, both by Jeep and on foot. Wherever he went, he was accompanied by Mundo, wearing his pistol belt, and escorted, in a second Jeep, by four *rifleros* from the ranch, all carrying fully automatic carbines loaded with oversize magazines.

Mundo watched with unconcealed curiosity as Jordan set up various instruments from a hard plastic case to measure the relative humidity of the air, the atmospheric temperature and wind velocity, the moisture content of the trees, the properties of their wood, and other characteristics of the rain forest.

"To start a fire, all this is necessary?" Mundo asked at one point, without rancor.

"Yes," said Jordan. "All of the information I gather is used to figure what is called a 'fire load' index. The index tells me how fast and how long the fire will burn, how far the wind will carry a burning ember, how wide the firebreaks must be to stop the burning at given points, and how much and the proper mix of the fire retardant we need for final extinguishment. Without all that and more, I wouldn't be able to control the fire. And without control, it could burn for miles; it could destroy the forest all the way to the mountains."

Mundo shook his head in wonder. "I owe you an apology, senor. I did not think what you did was important. I was mistaken."

Jordan paused in his work and turned to the foreman. "I'd like to ask you a question."

Mundo shrugged. "Ask."

Glancing at their armed escort, Jordan saw that they were too far away to overhear, but he lowered his voice a little, anyway. "Will all the Indians have time to get out once the burning starts?"

"Probably," Mundo said. But he averted his eyes when he said it.

"Only probably? Isn't there some way to warn them in advance? Give them more time?"

Mundo sighed with restrained impatience. "Senor, you underestimate the Nambi. There is not an Indian in the forest who does not

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already know that you are here and what you have come to do. Why do you think we have four men with rifles escorting us? We are being watched right now, at this moment. The Indians could already be moving deeper into the forest—they have plenty of time. But they won't. They won't go until they smell the smoke and see the flames."

"But why?" Jordan asked. His tone was an appeal for understanding. But Mundo would not satisfy him.

"Because they are Indians," was all the Brazilian would say, and once again he shrugged.

The next morning, Jordan sat down with Alves, Tonada, and Mundo to determine where the firebreaks would be dug by the transient laborers Alves was having bused in from the eastern mines, and to make up the list of chemicals and other supplies Jordan would need to keep the fire burning and to extinguish its final stages. Tonada was concerned about possible damage the chemicals might do to the soil.

"We must have enough good soil left to produce at least a ground cover of grass on which Senor Alves' cattle can graze. They do not have to feed off this grass, of course, because our firm will provide their food synthetically. But there must be a sufficient blanket of grazing growth to accommodate them between feedings."

"The ground won't be hurt below two inches of topsoil," Jordan assured him. "Bulldoze off two inches when you're razing the stumps and burnage, and you'll be able to grow anything then that you can grow now."

"That is satisfactory," Tonada said.

After the meeting, as Mundo was about to leave to drive up to the Trans-Amazon Highway to meet the labor buses, Jordan came out and got into the Jeep with him. "Drop me in the village, will you?" he asked casually.

Mundo hesitated. "I am not sure it is wise for you to go to Jaru alone, senor."

"Why not?"

"The Indians are not to be trusted."

"I'm sure I'll be safe," Jordan said. "I just want to look around, maybe buy some local handicrafts." When Mundo still hesitated, Jordan started to get out. "I can always walk."

"I will take you, senor," the foreman relented, "but I cannot be responsible for your safety."

Jordan smiled. "I didn't ask you to."

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They drove the several miles to Jaru and Mundo stopped to let Jordan out.

"I will be back through here in about four hours, senor," Mundo said. "I hope you will be waiting here so that Senor Alves does not have to send *rifleros* from the ranch to look for you."

Jordan watched as the Jeep with the angry bull on the spare-tire cover proceeded on past the little village. Then he turned and began to stroll a cobblestone street that led to a small square built around an ornate stone water-fountain. Around the square were small stores and businesses, some of them in wooden structures with corrugated roofs, some in crude A-frames with palm fronds forming thatched roofs and sides, others simply sidewalk stalls with canopies or old beach umbrellas to ward off the tropical sun. Jordan sauntered around, idly browsing. There wasn't much of interest to him. Jaru was not a *turista* town, and most of the wares were practical items of use to farmers and forest Indians. He did buy a wide-brimmed, flat-crowned straw hat with a woven snake band for which he imagined, from the smile on the vendor's face, he paid about ten times too much. But it didn't bother him—the vendor looked like he could use the money.

As Jordan meandered the square, he became aware that he was being followed. A dark-faced man, younger than he, dressed in a dirty white shirt and trousers, barefoot, seemed to be just behind Jordan wherever he went. And as Jordan moved from stall to stall, he noticed that the man was joined by a second, then a third, both of them dressed identically to the first. A fourth soon appeared, then a fifth. They spread out so that they formed a loose circle around Jordan.

Stopping at a stall, Jordan picked up a pair of braided sandals, pretending to examine them as his eyes, shaded by the wide brim of his new hat, quickly surveyed the area around him for the best possible route of escape. Since the forest was nearby in three directions, his options were limited. To go into that quagmire trying to escape Indians would be like leaping into fire to avoid a sunburn. Across the square, he saw a church of some kind, very modest in appearance, but its front door was open.

Before Jordan could make his move, three of the dark men were suddenly next to him and one was gesturing toward a small cantina a few yards away. Holding up both palms and shaking his head, Jordan tried to move away from them. Two of them flanked him and the third drew from the small of his back a black-bladed machete

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with a shiny half-inch razor edge from haft to point. With the weapon, the dark man pointed again to the cantina. Lowering his hands, Jordan allowed himself to be escorted toward its open doorway.

Inside, the place was all but squalid: a dirt floor on which stood a dozen scarred tables with leaning wooden chairs, a long plank of wood held up by two petroleum barrels which served as a bar, a portable radio on a wall shelf, from which static came Samba music, and a narrow archway leading to a second room emanating a pungent scent of something spicy being cooked. At a table in one corner sat the young woman and four-year-old girl Jordan had helped on the road. She half smiled at him but then quickly looked away at the sound of an authoritative male voice.

"Sit here, senor."

The voice, speaking Portuguese, came from an older man, perhaps the same age as Senor Alves. His complexion was very dark, like the men who had brought Jordan there, and his hair was black-and-white striped, like a zebra's. Something curved and yellow, perhaps three inches long, was embedded all the way through his left earlobe. Jordan sat down across from him, staring curiously at the earlobe.

"It is the prime tooth of a jaguar that I killed with a spear when I was young," the man said. "It is supposed to be a symbol of bravery. Between us—" he lowered his voice "—it is a symbol of foolishness. Spears are for pigs and small deer. If I faced a jaguar today, I would much prefer to have one of your employer's fancy shotguns."

"My employer?" said Jordan.

"Alves. Is he not your employer?"

"He is my client. I was hired by him to perform professional services."

"As you like," the older man conceded. He turned as a very old woman approached the table and set down two wooden mugs frothing over with something that looked like catalyzed acid. "This is a drink, senor, that you will not get in the magnificent hacienda of your, ah, client. This is specially fermented *aguaje* juice. Only the Nambiquara people know how to make it. To your health, senor," he said, and drank.

Jordan took a swallow. "Good God," he said, barely able to keep from choking. It was like drinking ignited kerosene.

"A few swallows and you will be used to it," the dark man promised. "Now then, as you *yanquis* say, let us be down to business. I am Paulo. At least, that is my name here in the village. In the rain

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forest, among the Nambiquara, of whom I am the hereditary chief, I have other names and many titles, but they are of no consequence between you and me. I speak to you as one man to another. You have created a problem for me, senor."

"How can that be?" Jordan asked. "Five minutes ago, I didn't even know you existed."

"Sometimes, senor, we cast shadows that we cannot see. Before you even arrived here, your death had been ordered by our tribal council. We knew when you were coming, and why. You were to be skinned and hung by your feet from one of the hacienda trees for Alves to see."

Jordan swallowed drily. Paulo nudged his drink closer and Jordan took another fiery sip. As soon as it went down, he was certain the inside of his mouth had been blistered. "Good *God*," he said again.

"Soon it will not burn," Paulo assured him. "Soon it will be cool."

It'll be too late, Jordan thought. His throat would be incinerated. Glancing over at the woman and child, he saw that she was watching in amusement. Next time I'll let her kid bleed to death, he thought irritably.

"Back to the problem you have caused," Paulo said. "On the day of your arrival, you gave aid to Apuri, the woman in the corner. You helped her injured child. To do so, you had to defy the half snake Mundo. He had a pistol, but you defied him, anyway. Because of what you did, we now cannot skin you and hang you from a tree at the hacienda."

"I wouldn't worry about it," Jordan said. He raised his wooden mug. "I think you've found another way to kill me." Actually, he had already decided that Paulo wasn't going to harm him at all. People who were serious about hurting someone didn't talk about it first. Jordan drank again. It was just as searing.

"Be patient," Paulo counseled.

"Why are you telling me all this?" Jordan asked. "Are you trying to frighten me?"

Paulo shook his head. "You have already demonstrated that you are not one to be frightened. No, I am telling you this to let you know that we still intend to do something about you. We just do not know what." Paulo pursed his lips for a moment. "Would you consider letting our tribe pay you *not* to burn our rain forest?"

Jordan shook his head. "I have made an agreement. Would you make an agreement and not keep it?"

"No," Paulo admitted.

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"Anyhow," Jordan reasoned, "Alves would just bring in someone else."

"Ah, but him we could skin and hang in the tree," Paulo pointed out.

Jordan shook his head again. "I have an agreement."

Paulo sighed quietly. "Tell me," he asked presently, "how much time do we have?"

"Five days. Maybe six."

Paulo raised his mug and, as Jordan watched in awe, drained it in several long swallows. "There is much thinking to do," he said, rising. He beckoned to the woman in the corner. "Come, Apuri."

Apuri rose with her child and came across the room as Paulo walked to the door. At the table she paused and Jordan thought she was going to speak to him. Instead she merely looked at him, as if trying to decide something. Jordan stared back at her, seeing her face up close and not in distress or anguish for the first time. She was lighter than Paulo, clay-colored, with hair that was flat black, not shiny, like bituminous coal. Her eyes, which he initially had assumed were simply wide with the ordeal of her child bleeding, were in fact naturally wide, the widest he had ever seen; they were glossy chocolate, and as she looked down at him he could see flecks of jasmine color in them. When he was sure she wasn't going to speak first, he decided to. But before he could, Paulo called her from the door.

"Apuri, come."

In a moment they were gone and Jordan was left alone in the dingy little cantina. His expression was pensive, almost somber. Without thinking, he raised his mug and drank again. Then he grinned and shook his head. The *aguaje* did not burn this time. It went down cool.

For the next few days, Jordan supervised the digging of the firebreaks around the perimeter to be burned. Long lines of sweating brown men with picks and shovels, following a rope line, chopped out a precise, knee-high trench that looked like a surgical incision on a great green body. As usual, where Jordan went he was accompanied by Mundo, and they were escorted by *rifleros* from the ranch. Several times Senor Alves and the Japanese advisor Tonada drove out to visit the work site, and each time Jordan and Mundo were complimented on the progress being made. The praise meant nothing to Jordan, but Mundo seemed to bask in it. Jordan noticed that

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whenever Alves was around Mundo straightened his posture, firmed up his expression, and in general brought his demeanor to parade-ground attention. Like a schoolboy trying to become teacher's pet, Jordan thought.

"How long have you worked for Alves?" he asked one day as they drew drinking water from a cask in the Jeep.

"All my life," Mundo said. "When I was a boy, I worked in the hacienda, running errands, helping in the kitchen. When I got older, I was put in the barns to learn about the cattle. Then I was given a part of the herd to supervise. On my thirtieth birthday, Senor Alves promoted me to foreman of the entire ranch. It was a very proud day for me."

"I'm sure," Jordan said. After drinking some water, he asked, "Does Alves live here all alone? I never see anyone about except servants."

"His family is away at the present. At their chateau in Switzerland. His three daughters go to school there. The senora stays with them."

"He has no sons?"

Mundo glanced away. "No. No sons."

Always, during the digging of the firebreaks, Jordan had the eerie feeling that they were being watched by many eyes from the fecund growth around them. It was not difficult to imagine Paulo's dark young men, stripped out of their dirty village whites, wearing loincloths and body paint, peering down from some high tree. How easy it would probably be, he thought, for them to let loose enough poisoned arrows to kill him, Mundo, and all the *rifleros* at one time, and send the hired laborers back where they came from. He asked Mundo why the Nambiquara didn't resist more dynamically.

"If they did," Mundo explained, "they might lose the entire rain forest at once. As it is, the government has decreed that only so many square hectares per year can be burned. But if the Indians rose up in force, the Army would probably come in and wipe them out. Then the entire forest would go at once. If they do nothing to upset the government, they will have their forest, although smaller and smaller, for another ten years."

Jordan thought of Apuri's little girl. She would run out of rain forest when she was about fourteen.

Rinsing his mouth, Jordan turned and spat water onto the ground. "If I was a Nambi," he said, "I'd fight now."

Mundo stiffened. "I beg your pardon, senor?"

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"You heard me," Jordan told him, and walked away.

In the middle of the night, in his bed in one of the hacienda guest rooms, Jordan felt a hand cover his mouth and a voice whisper in his ear. "Do not call out. It is Apuri."

He was sleeping naked with only a light sheet over him, and he could feel her body on top of his. She was surprisingly light. With her head bent, her lips to his ear, some of her hair spilled over his face and tickled him gently. "How did you get in?" he whispered.

"Through the window."

"No, I mean how did you get into the hacienda compound?" He knew the grounds were patrolled day and night by armed men.

"I go anywhere I want to in the rain forest," she said. "It is mine. I was born here."

She shifted her weight and slipped under the sheet with him. She was as naked as he. "Aren't you going to ask me why I came?"

"I don't care why you came." He put an arm under her neck and she lay her face against his chest. "Why did you?"

"Perhaps to settle my debt for your help. I have no other way to pay."

Jordan said nothing.

"You do not like that answer," she said matter-of-factly.

Still he didn't speak.

"You would rather I say that I came because I desire you."

"Say whatever you must," he told her, with a trace of irritation. She was silent for what seemed to him an uncommonly long time. Then he felt her putting his hands where she wanted them and she whispered, "I came because I desire you. Very much."

Their lovemaking was far too brief, as it always is the first time, hunger overcoming passion. Then they lay in the dark whispering again, resting, waiting for what they both seemed to know would be a longer, slower, more fulfilling union.

"Paulo was almost captured today," she told him. They were side by side on their backs, only their fingers touching, the sweat drying on their bodies.

"Captured by whom?" Jordan asked.

"By Alves' *rifleros*," she said in the same matter-of-fact tone. "They have been trying to catch him for many months."

"Why? What has he done?"

"He and his band of young men steal cattle from Alves. They butcher the animals and distribute the meat among our people.

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Paulo says it is payment for that part of the rain forest that Alves has already taken. The more forest he takes, the less *aguaje* fruit there is to harvest, and the more the income of the tribe is reduced. Paulo says Alves' cattle must make up the difference."

"What will Alves do with Paulo if he catches him?"

"Alves says he will have him taken to Brasilia and turned over to the authorities for trial. But everyone knows he will take him into the forest and hang him."

After a while, when he could feel his vigor returning, his ardor growing again, Jordan eased the conversation back to a personal vein. "How is your little girl—what's her name, anyway?"

"Her name is Evora, and she is well, thank you."

"Where is her father?" he asked, and felt her shrug in the darkness.

"I do not even know who her father is. When I was fifteen, I was very wanton. I had many boys. My mother beat me regularly."

"Are you still wanton?" Jordan rolled over toward her.

"No, I am now very chaste." She placed his hands again. "Can't you tell?"

When the firebreaks were completed, most of the transient laborers were bused back to where they came from. Only a few were retained to hoe out the long, shallow incendiary furrows Jordan had designed to crisscross the area to be burned.

"How are these slits used?" Tonada asked on one of the inspection visits he and Alves regularly made.

"They're for the combustible chemicals I use to feed the fire," Jordan explained. "In an area with as much thick growth as this one, we can't depend on the wind. There's more than enough oxygen, but it doesn't move. So I seed the ground with combustibles to keep the fire moving."

"Ingenious," the Japanese muttered to himself. He was, it seemed to Jordan, fascinated by fire. "Could you," Tonada asked, "use this same method to burn a small town?"

"Probably. Why?"

"My firm has for several years been purchasing property in a small town in the state of Tennessee in your country. As soon as we own the entire town, we plan to evict everyone, raze the place, and with our American partners build a vast automobile-manufacturing plant and industrial complex. One of the problems we have been looking at is how to cost-effectively demolish the town. Until now,

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fire had not been considered." He smiled his humorless smile at Jordan. "Would you have any reservations about undertaking such a project?"

"Not as long as it's legal," Jordan said.

"Oh, it will be very legal," Tonada assured. "As I said, we have American partners—lawyers, bankers, politicians."

Jordan took out his wallet and gave Tonada a business card. On it was only his name and a Los Angeles telephone number. "This is a service which will relay a message to me. I require full payment in advance, deposited to my Cayman Island bank account."

"Of course." Tonada bowed slightly. "Perhaps we can do business in the future, you and I. You burn what is old, I build what is new. Partners in progress."

"I'm not a partner in anything," Jordan declared. "I'm an independent contractor. I come in, do a job, and leave. I don't get involved."

"That is wise," Tonada allowed.

He was smiling again, and this time there was humor in his expression. He doesn't believe me, Jordan thought.

Jordan turned and resumed his work. It didn't matter to him what Tonada thought. Or anyone else.

Jordan went his own way.

When Mundo was getting ready to drive to Porto Velho to pick up the chemicals that had been flown in from Manaus, he said to Jordan, "Would you like to ride into the village again?"

"I thought you didn't want me going into the village," Jordan remarked. It was actually a question.

Mundo shrugged. "You seem to have been safe enough last time. If anything was going to happen to you, it would already have happened. The Nambi are not patient people."

Jordan considered the offer for a moment. He had already planned to walk into the village after Mundo left. Finally he said, "Sure, I'll ride in with you."

When Mundo dropped him off this time, Jordan walked to the square and went directly to the little cantina where he'd been taken to meet Paulo. Three of Paulo's young barefoot men in dirty white trousers and shirts were sitting at a table drinking the fiery fermented *aguaje* juice and listening to samba music on the radio. They didn't look up as Jordan entered and walked over to them.

"Can someone tell me how to find Apuri?" he asked in Portuguese.

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No one answered, and still they did not look up, merely kept their eyes on their hands around the wooden mugs from which they drank. Jordan repeated the question in Spanish. He got no reply to that language, either. They understood him, he was certain. Even if he had spoken to them in their own dialect, they probably wouldn't have responded.

Moving to another table, Jordan sat down. The same old woman who had served him and Paulo came out of the kitchen and stood next to him. "*Aguaje*," Jordan ordered. What the hell, he had survived it once.

As he sat drinking a little while later, one of the young men rose and went into the kitchen and didn't come back. Ten minutes later, Apuri came into the cantina through the same kitchen door and walked directly to his table.

"Why are you looking for me?" she asked.

"Because I want to see you."

"Why do you want to see me?"

"I don't know why, I just do. I've been thinking about you."

"What have you been thinking?"

"Everything. How you look, feel, smell, taste—"

Apuri glanced nervously at the street door. "Is that half snake coming back for you?"

"No. He's gone to Porto Velho."

"We cannot talk here," she said. "Come with me."

She led Jordan through the kitchen and out to a dirt alley. She walked briskly down the alley as he hurried to keep up with her. "You and Paulo both called Mundo a half snake," he said as they walked. "Why only a half?"

"One half of him is human," Apuri said, "because he was born of a Nambiquaran mother. The snake part is from his father—Alves."

"Alves is Mundo's *father?*"

"Yes. Mundo's mother was a domestic at the hacienda. Servants there are treated as property. It is not unusual for a female servant to become pregnant by her master. Mundo was born there in the servants' quarters."

"Is his mother still there?"

"No. Several years later, she contracted syphilis from Alves and died when it was left untreated. He got medical attention for himself, of course." Apuri turned into a path that led away from the alley and up a gradual incline. At the top of the path was a shabby wooden house with smoke coming out of a stovepipe chimney.

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"In here—" she took his hand and drew him inside. An older woman and another young woman about Apuri's age were cooking at a black iron stove. A naked baby played on the dirt floor with a large wooden spoon. From behind the house came the sound of other children's voices. "We can talk over here," Apuri said, going to the farthest corner away from the stove. As they passed a rear window, Jordan glanced out and saw Paulo sitting on a stool behind the house, talking to a dozen children of various ages who sat in a group before him. On his lap was Apuri's daughter, Evora.

Apuri sat on the floor in the corner and drew her knees up. "We must whisper," she cautioned Jordan, "so my mother and sister will not hear. They are very meddlesome and will try to listen."

"What is Paulo doing?" Jordan asked, sitting beside her, drawing his own knees up.

"Teaching the village children about our tribe," Apuri said. "He is the hereditary chief and it is his duty to be certain that Nambi children who live in the village know what came before them."

"Isn't it dangerous for him to be here?"

"Yes—but he is here, anyway." A trace of impatience sharpened her tone. "Did you come here to talk about Paulo?"

"No, I came to—"

"Whisper!"

"I came to talk about you," he said in his quietest undertone.

"What about me?"

"The other night was very nice."

"I know."

"Very special."

"Yes, for me as well. But it is over."

"Apuri," he said urgently, "why do you stay here?"

"This is my home, where I belong."

"In a few years, that home will be gone. In a few years, the whole rain forest will be gone. Where will your home be then?"

Apuri stared at Jordan but did not reply. It was a question for which she had no answer.

"Listen," he said, moving his face very close to hers, "when I leave here I'm going to Valparaiso in Chile. There's a big oil field there that's having a lot of burnoff problems and they want me to design a new system for them. I'll probably be there for several months. If you wanted to, you could come with me, just to see how you'd like living away from the rain forest."

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"Me?" she said. He saw her shoulders stiffen. "What about my child?"

"Her, too, of course. I—"

"You would take us both?"

"Of course. I wouldn't ask you to leave your child." Jordan took her hand. "You could see how you liked living somewhere else."

"And how I liked living with you?"

"Yes."

"We are very different," she warned.

"On the outside. Not on the inside. Not what we feel."

She tilted her head an inch, in that way she had. "Are you doing this so Paulo won't kill you?"

Jordan shook his head. "Paulo won't kill me."

Apuri sighed. "No, you are right."

Jordan squeezed her hand. "Will you try it, Apuri?"

She glanced at her mother and sister, and caught them looking at her. They quickly looked away. This was an impossible place to make such plans. "Let me consider it," she said.

Before Jordan could speak again, they all suddenly heard the sound of heavy footsteps at the front door. Half a dozen men with weapons burst into the room. Jordan recognized them at once as *rifleros* from the Alves ranch.

"We are looking for the cattle thief!" one of them shouted. "Paulo! Where is he?"

"My God!" Apuri's hand went to her throat in fear. Her mother screamed and her sister ran for the baby.

"Out back!" one of the men yelled.

The intruders bullied through the room toward the rear door. One of them tripped over the baby before Apuri's sister could get to it. The man cursed and roughly pushed the infant aside with his boot. Jordan leaped to his feet and grabbed him.

"You bastard!"

The *riflero* butt-stroked Jordan across the face with the weapon stock and Jordan dropped heavily back to the dirt floor.

"Paulo, flee!" Apuri yelled out the window as the men rushed through the little house.

Rolling over, Jordan got to his knees. Just as he did, there was the sound of gunfire behind the house.

"Oh, dear God, the children!" Apuri screamed.

Jordan tried to stand. Blood rushed out of his brain with the effort and he sank back again. The last thing he saw was Apuri staring

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out the window, her face stricken with horror. Then he lost consciousness.

When he awoke, he was on his bed in the hacienda guest room. Two women of the household staff were putting wet cloths on his forehead and washing a three-inch abrasion on his jawbone where he'd been hit. Standing on the other side of the bed were Alves, Tonada, and Mundo.

"Where is she?" Jordan asked thickly. "Where's Apuri?"

"Deep in the rain forest, I imagine," said Alves. "That's where they usually run to."

"Paulo?"

"Escaped again." Alves' voice was exasperated and angry at the same time. "The man is like a ghost. He seems to evaporate at will."

Jordan remembered the children and the look on Apuri's face. "There was shooting. Was anyone hurt?"

"I'm afraid," Alves said, glancing away, "that two Nambi children were killed."

"Two *children?*" Jordan rose on one elbow and stared at the wealthy rancher. *Was one of them Apuri's child?*

"It was an unfortunate accident," Alves defended himself, regret obvious in his tone. Then his expression became stern. "And I must remind you, senor, that these matters are not your concern. These are community matters and you are a foreigner here. It was foolish of you to involve yourself with these Indians in the first place. You do not understand them."

Jordan turned hard eyes on Mundo. "You set me up," he accused. "You gave me a ride to the village so that I could be followed."

"That is a lie!" Mundo snapped.

"My foreman knew nothing of this," Alves declared. "You were observed by my informants in the village the first time you talked with Paulo. I had you followed today when Mundo let you off."

Jordan pushed away the hand of the woman treating his face and sat up on the side of the bed. "I'm leaving," he said evenly. "Get somebody else to burn the rain forest."

"Oh, no, senor," Alves said firmly. "We have a contract, you and I. My money has already been deposited in your Cayman Island bank."

"You'll get your money back."

Alves shook his head. "No, senor. You contracted to do this job for me and you will not leave here until it is done."

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Jordan stood. "If you think you can force me to do it, you're crazy."

"Mr. Jordan," Tonada interrupted, "I implore you to be reasonable. Our host, I am afraid, is running out of patience."

"Too bad he didn't run out of bullets," Jordan said tightly. "Maybe those two kids wouldn't have been shot."

"I regret that as much as you do, senor," Alves told him stiffly. "But I will not be intimidated by an unfortunate fact that I cannot change. You will complete your contract."

"I will not."

"Think for a moment, Mr. Jordan," Tonada said. "You are in a very precarious position. Everything is ready for the burning. All that remains is to place the combustible chemicals and ignite them. That can be done by anyone."

"Hardly. You don't know how much to use."

"Exactly. If we did it without you, we would no doubt use too much. The result would be a more intense fire. Without you to control it, it would probably spread to parts of the rain forest which are still protected by government decree. There is documented proof that you contracted to do this fire. If it burns out of control, it will be you the government blames. That could result in criminal charges. And Brazil, Mr. Jordan, does not have prisons as modern and comfortable as your country."

"You're not scaring me, Tonada."

"Consider this, then," Alves spoke again. "If the fire burns out of control, many more Nambi will be made homeless. Unhindered, a fire we set might burn all the way to the mountains—you said so yourself, to Mundo. The entire Nambi tribe might find itself without a rain forest in mere days instead of years. You seem to have developed a certain, ah, *affinity* toward them. Do you wish to see them burned out entirely? If you do, senor, believe me, I will most certainly accommodate you."

Jordan stared at Alves without speaking. He thought of Apuri, Paulo, the young men, the women, the children. While the rain forest burned, they would lose everything: their past, their present, their future—everything.

Alves had him, Jordan thought. The rancher, with a set expression on his face, knew it. And Tonada knew it. And Mundo, the half snake.

The following day, Jordan seeded the chemicals in the patchwork of incendiary furrows. The mixed chemicals were granulated, in

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canvas sacks red in color to signify their volatility. Jordan opened each sack and spread the granules by hand. He worked under a heavy guard of *rifleros*, with Mundo constantly at his side, watching his every move. Jordan made no effort to conceal his animosity for the foreman.

"Do you know what the Nambi call you?" he asked as he stirred the combustibles and sprinkled them in the cut earth.

"I have no interest in what uncivilized savages call me," Mundo replied aloofly.

"They call you a half snake."

Mundo swallowed and looked away.

"I asked you once if Alves had any sons," Jordan reminded him. "You said no. I guess down here bastards don't count."

Resting a hand on his pistol, Mundo looked at him. "You are treading on perilous ground, senor."

Jordan paused in his work and smiled. "What will you do, Mundo? Shoot me? Your daddy wouldn't like that. Who would control the fire then?" When Mundo looked away once again, Jordan shook his head in contempt. "How can you remain so loyal to a man who won't even recognize you as his son?"

Later that day when they were eating lunch in a small clearing, Mundo said, "You do not understand our culture in Brazil, senor. Bloodlines are sacred down here. Senor Alves cannot acknowledge a child born out of wedlock without dishonoring his consecrated family. He is bound by centuries of a tradition which both he and I respect. He has done the best he could to give me a place here."

"Did he do his best by your mother?" Jordan asked quietly.

"He would have. My mother died of malaria when I was very young."

"Your mother died of syphilis," Jordan told him. "She caught it from him."

"That is a lie." Mundo's expression turned hard and dangerous. "My mother died of malaria. It states so on her grave marker."

"A grave marker says only what the living want said."

Mundo stood, his eyes flat and deadly. "I warn you, senor. Do not speak to me of personal matters again. If you do, I will wait until after the rain forest has burned and then I will kill you. If you wish to leave the Mato Grosso alive, concern yourself only with the work you must complete. I will not warn you again."

Jordan watched as Mundo took his plate of food and went over to eat with the *rifleros*.

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For the rest of the day, Jordan worked in silence. By late afternoon, all the furrows were seeded. There was a nearly full red sack of the combustible granules left, which Jordan closed up and put in the back of Mundo's Jeep. "Bring this with you tomorrow," he told the foreman. "In case it rains in any part of the burn area, we'll need it to reseed."

"It will not rain," Mundo said impassively. "This is not the rainy season."

"Bring it anyway," Jordan ordered.

Mundo's eyes fixed on him. The Brazilian clearly did not like being given orders by Jordan. "As you wish, senor," he said unsmilingly. "You are still in charge. For now."

They drove back to the hacienda, neither speaking. Approaching the broad clearing where the estate house stood, Jordan couldn't help thinking how placid and serene it all looked. The great house, surrounded by its lush green lawn and rows of exotic flower beds, backdropped by the cornucopian rain forest in all its luxuriant natural beauty, was a splendid sight to behold.

On one of the wide verandas, Alves and Tonada were sitting under rotating ceiling fans, sipping cool drinks as native servants stood nearby to anticipate their needs. On the vast lawn, gardeners pushed fertilizer spreaders, distributing Tonada's synthetic mulch. The gardeners, Jordan noticed, moved in a crisscross pattern much like the layout of the incendiary furrows. Simple gardeners, he thought with a trace of bitterness. Even they contribute—they *grow*. I only destroy. It was the first time in his life that he had ever felt any remorse about what he did. Perhaps, he rationalized, it was the two Nambi children who had been shot. If it were not for him, those children would still be alive. And one of them might have been Apuri's little girl.

The thought haunted him.

At dawn the following morning, Jordan began the burn.

Fires were lighted at two corners of the squared tract, and the cross-sections ignited in a V-pattern to burn toward the opposite two corners where the firebreaks had been dug. The belt of flame moved along the forest floor like a fiery snake and began to enkindle everything in its path. As it moved steadily forward, it left in its wake many pitches of flame that started climbing upward on trees, vines, leaves, whatever foliage it could reach. From it, the heat came: an invisible cloud of it, gushing out like the hot breath of an unseen

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monster. And the smoke: first a stream, then a spiral, then a great cloud, rolling across the top of the forest as if released from a sluice.

Ash began to sift out of the scorching mass; it settled on the bare, sweaty face and arms of Jordan and Mundo as they drove back and forth in the face of the fire to chart its progress. Now and again on one of the dirt roads, the two men saw nearly naked Indians—men, women, children, old people—hurrying away from the consuming blaze, carrying their pitiful belongings in their arms, their faces set in fear of what was happening to them today, and in dread of tomorrow. Their world had turned into hell.

When Jordan saw the Nambiquara children, he cursed under his breath, damning Alves, damning Mundo, and damning himself because he was part of it, too. We will all pay for this, he told himself. We *must* pay for it.

The fire burned for nine hours, devastating everything it touched, reducing the fecund square of rain forest to an ugly black landscape of ashes, cinder, and burn waste. As fires went, Jordan knew, it was a good fire: never out of control, burning only what it was set to burn, remaining within the periphery established by him; he could not complain about the fire. He had done his job well, as he always did. When the fire stopped where it was supposed to stop, when the flames became embers, when the smoke drifted away on the high air and the heat started to dissipate, Jordan should have felt satisfaction at his accomplishment. But he didn't. He only felt a bleak despondency that, because of the two children, was distressing him to the very pit of his being.

I must shake this, he told himself firmly. I must get hold of my mind. It's up to me to see that what we've done doesn't go unpunished—

"Is it over now?" Mundo asked, intruding on his dismal thoughts. They were in the Jeep, parked just beyond the firebreak at which the burning had stopped. Jordan looked around at the destruction.

"Yes, it's over," he said. Dry words forced through parched lips.

Jordan watched as Mundo poured water from a canteen onto a handkerchief and washed his face and arms of the black ash that had streaked them. Jordan himself didn't bother. He felt dirty, so he might as well look dirty.

Mundo started the Jeep and drove them back to the hacienda. Alves and Tonada were standing on the broad front lawn, at the outer edges of which the gardeners were completing the synthetic

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fertilizing they had begun the previous day. Mundo parked in the drive that bordered the lawn. Jordan saw that his duffel bag was packed and waiting on the driveway. Alves and Tonada walked over to the Jeep. At a gesture from Alves, a nearby servant hurried to put the bag in the back of the Jeep, next to the red sack from the previous day's seeding.

"Your work is done here, senor," said Alves. "Mundo will drive you to Porto Velho. There is a commuter plane back to Manaus tonight. Our association is over."

"No," Jordan told him quietly, "it's not over."

Alves stared at him for a grave moment. "Leave, senor," he said softly, "while you still can." He nodded curtly for Mundo to be on his way.

The Jeep moved away from the great house in the rain forest.

As they drove toward the edge of the clearing, Jordan's mind raced to think of some way to make Mundo pull over when they reached the forest. Mundo, as usual, had his gunbelt on, the holstered pistol on the side next to Jordan. If I pretend to turn and reach toward my duffel bag, Jordan thought, maybe I can grab the gun away from him before he can react. It was risky at best, but Jordan saw no other way.

The Jeep left the clearing and in seconds was into the thick forest, out of sight of the hacienda. Jordan was just about to make his move for the gun when he looked ahead of them on the road and saw that he would not have to.

Paulo and a dozen of his men suddenly appeared from the forest and blocked the road.

Mundo stomped on the brake and brought the Jeep skidding sideways to a halt. He drew his gun and cocked it as the men surrounded them. Four of Paulo's men drew back on taut bowstrings and aimed arrows at Mundo. Everything froze—a moment of looming violence suspended, waiting. Paulo and Mundo locked eyes in a fierce stare.

"Are you going to shoot?" Paulo finally asked.

Mundo swallowed and uncocked the pistol. "No."

Paulo stepped over and took the gun from his hand. "Do you know why we have come for you?" he asked.

Mundo wet his lips. "You think I led the *rifleros* to the house. You think I am responsible for the children dying."

"That is the reason," Paulo acknowledged, nodding.

"I did not do it," Mundo said. "I had no part in it."

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"That I cannot believe," said the old chief.

Mundo shrugged. "There is no way I can prove it."

"Maybe there is," said Jordan, speaking for the first time. He got out of the Jeep and walked around behind it. From the back he removed the red canvas sack, opened it, and poured its contents onto the ground. What spilled out was not leftover combustible granules from the previous day, but dirt.

"I don't understand," said Mundo, frowning.

"Come with me," Jordan said, walking back toward the edge of the clearing. Mundo hesitated, but at a nod from Paulo he followed Jordan. Paulo and his men fell in step behind them.

Jordan led them to the last stand of trees, where the forest broke and the clearing began and flowed into the manicured lawn of the hacienda. A group of gardeners working nearby paused and looked at them apprehensively.

"The combustible granules are there," Jordan said, waving an arm. "I slipped out of my room in the middle of the night, took them from your Jeep, and mixed them into Tonada's fertilizer. Then I filled the red sack with dirt and replaced it." From his pocket, he took a small box of stick matches and tossed them to Mundo. "You want Paulo to believe you're innocent? Give him a reason to believe it. Get rid of the half of yourself they call snake."

Mundo stared at Jordan in disbelief. "This is insane—"

"No, it's *right*," Jordan insisted. His jaw clenched. "Do it."

Mundo looked at Paulo, at Paulo's young men with their inscrutable faces, and back at Jordan. "It's insane!"

"Do it for your mother, Mundo," said Jordan.

The foreman's expression tightened. A grimness settled in it, and his black eyes suddenly took on depth, like two dark wells into his mind. "Yes—" he whispered, more to himself than to the men around him "—I'll do it for my mother."

Mundo took a match from the box, struck it, and tossed it onto the lawn. The granules in the grass ignited at once. Everyone except Jordan watched in awe as the fire spread like a lighted fuse. It swept over the blanket of lawn like a wave breaking on a beach. Then urgent shouts rose as the gardeners ran for safety.

Alves hurried onto the front veranda of his great house, a group of servants in his wake. Tonada rushed to his side. The rancher began waving his arms and shouting orders, but no one seemed to be listening to him. When the fire reached the house and began

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burning the foundation, the servants followed the gardeners to safety. Presently Alves and Tonada fled also.

Jordan and the others watched until the great house was burning smartly. Then Paulo said, "Come, we must go. It will not take Alves long to organize his *rifleros*."

In the Nambi camp, Jordan learned with enormous relief that Apuri's child had not been one of those killed. In front of Paulo and Mundo, he renewed his proposal that she leave the forest and go with him to Chile. She refused.

"I cannot abandon my family, my people, my home," she said. "A person cannot run away from what they are."

Jordan felt as if he had been kicked in the chest. His mind roiled desperately not to lose her. Turning to Paulo, he said, "Let me stay with the Nambi. Let me fight with you."

Paulo shook his head. "If you stay, the government will send the Army into the forest after you." His wise old eyes flicked to Mundo. He handed him the pistol he had taken earlier. "You cannot remain, either. Even though you have redeemed yourself as a Nambiquara, for the good of the tribe you must leave. The gardeners saw you start the fire—the Army would come for you also. But if you both leave, our tribe will face only the *rifleros* again. We can deal with them; we cannot deal with the Army."

Mundo laughed softly and started for the Jeep. "Come on," he said over his shoulder to Jordan, "we don't have much time."

Jordan turned hurt eyes to Apuri. "Is there no way at all for us?"

"Not today," she said quietly. "Perhaps a faroff tomorrow."

"If I come back?"

"Yes." She looked away. "If you come back."

Mundo drove the Jeep up next to him. "If you want to keep living, get in."

Apuri was still looking away. Jordan took a deep breath and got in the Jeep. Without a backward glance, Mundo drove out of the camp.

On the road, Jordan asked, "Where are we going?"

"Bolivia," said Mundo. "It's the nearest border."

"Do you think we'll make it?"

"Maybe," Mundo said. "If we're lucky."

The Jeep sped through what was left of the rain forest.

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HOMEWORKERS NEEDED! TOP PAY! These words can mean FRAUD! Profitable homework is possible, but don't get taken! FREE REPORT! Send long SASE to: Consumer Network, Dept.-4, Box 8135, St. Paul, MN 55108.

ULTIMATE Opportunity. Become Financially Independent. Working Full or Part Time. Call 24 Hour Recorded Message (212) 330-0470. It could Change Your Life Forever!

"A NO-NONSENSE WAY TO 500 A DAY!" $1 + SASE: ABSOLUTE SUCCESS UNLIMITED, P.O. Box 710891, San Diego 92111.

MAKE $500 STUFFING 500 ENVELOPES. Postage/supplies furnished. Free Details. Gemini, Box 215-IO, Brooklyn, NY 11204.

THIS IS A FIRST. Make them the star of their very own personalized book or poster. 32 laminated pages in color. Her picture appears on 23 pages. Representatives wanted for personal, route, mail-order, fund-raising, chain store sales. Jeff Roberts Company, 299 Newport Avenue (S8), Wollaston, MA 02170.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

$1,000s WEEKLY possible processing mail! Start immediately! FREE supplies/postage! Rush stamped envelope! MLC, Box 3559-ZM, Danbury, CT 06813.

UNUSUAL HOME BUSINESS! GET PAID FOR SOMETHING YOU ALREADY DO—MAKE EVEN MORE GETTING PAID FOR SOMETHING OTHERS ALREADY DO. AMAZING RECORDED MESSAGE REVEALS DETAILS: 301-637-5972 DEPT. 128.

FREE REPORT: Earn $7,000 monthly as Loan Broker without experience/investment. Financial, Box 3578-N, Anaheim, CA 92803.

ALUMINUM Scrap—Recycle Yourself—Make up to $25.00/Pound! Free information: Industrial-IO291, Box 127, Alexandria Bay, New York 13607.

$60.00 per HUNDRED securing/stuffing envelopes!! Offer—details, rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial PA-22, X17410, Fort Lauderdale 33318.

SELL Books By Mail! $50,000 Yearly! Free 80 Page Get Started Manual! Quality, Box 6060-PJ, Miller Place, NY 11764.

VENDING MACHINES: All types available. Factory Direct! Guaranteed Lowest Prices! FREE Listing/Machine Offer. Visa/MC. (609) 866-0440.

FIGHT INFLATION! Earn extra income. Details $1 + Sase to: H. Lee, 55 Minor Terrace, Childersburg, AL 35044.

VENDING MACHINES: All types available. Factory Direct! Guaranteed Lowest Prices! FREE Listing/Machine Offer. Visa/MC. (609) 866-0440.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

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PERSONAL—Cont'd

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD,Chula Vista, CA 92012.

PEARLS Of The Orient Want To Write You. Details, Photos FREE, VIDEOS AVAILABLE. (#1 In Service Since 1979.) PAL, Blanca, CO 81123-0051. 800-777-1932 Ex. 5767.

MEET Beautiful Women! We supply photos, names, addresses! Send for Free Details! Merit, Box 74758-AE, Los Angeles, CA 90004.

ASIAN WOMEN desire friendship, marriage! Free details, photos! SUNSHINE INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE, Box 5500-HF, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii 96745. (808) 325-7707.

BEAUTIFUL BRITISH LADIES & ELIGIBLE GENTLEMEN seek American ladies & gentlemen for Friendship/Romance/Marriage! Free details: English Rose Agency, 2nd Floor, Mill Lane House, Mill Lane, Margate, Kent, England. Tel: 01144-843-290735.

MEET USA singles by direct phone/mail. M. Fischer Club, Box 2152-V, Loves Park, IL 61130.

RECIPES

TEN Tasty chicken recipes. Send $5/Sase to: A. Roger, 384 Adirondack Drive, Farmingville, NY 11738.

SOUTHERN Pecan Pies. Best ever. Easy. $1, SASE: Recipes, PO Box 3001, Meriden, MS 39303.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, PA 17349.

TRAVEL

SAVE money! Detailed info including toll-free numbers for budget motels, car rentals, airlines, etc. $2.00 SSAE to: Chandler, Box 576, New York, NY 10028.

CRUISE LOVERS BOOKLET. All you want to know about Top 50 cruise ships, special rates bulletin included. Mail $6.00: CLA, P.O. Box 862278, Marietta, GA 30062.

For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48 00 for 15 Words or Less
$3 20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the *5th day of the third preceding month for issue in* which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $3 20 each $_____

_____ Capitalized word at 40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $_____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 – $_____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by _____ x .85
(c) Total amount for 3 ads $_____

(Example One 15 word ad $48 00 x 3 months $144 00 x 85 $122 40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad Each initial or number counts as 1 word Mark Holly 380 Lexington Avenue New York New York 10017 7 WORDS Zip codes are not counted Phone # 2 Words Symbols used as keys are charged for City or State count as 1 word each Garden City New York 2 words Abbreviations such as C O D F O B P O U S A 7x10 35mm count as 1 word (P O Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling compound words hyphens abbreviations etc **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

NEXT ISSUE...

7 NEW stories—including

JOE GORES (about sleeping the big sleep)

JAMES POWELL (about an impossible crime)

RICHARD MATHESON (about entrapment)

plus 2 reprints

GEORGES SIMENON ("Blessed Are the Meek")

CLAYTON RAWSON ("From Another World")

and Part 4 in EQMM's 50th Anniversary Contest!

ELEANOR SULLIVAN ..... *Editor*
RUSSELL ATWOOD ..... *Managing Editor*
TERRI CZECZKO ..... *Art Director*
RON KULINER ..... *Associate Art Director*
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ELLERY QUEEN
Editor-in-Chief (1941–1982)

Advertising Sales Office

NEW YORK
212-557-9100

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POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7052, Red Oak, IA 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario N9B 3E1. ISSN: 0013-6328. For back issues, send $3.50 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 40, Vernon, NJ 07462.

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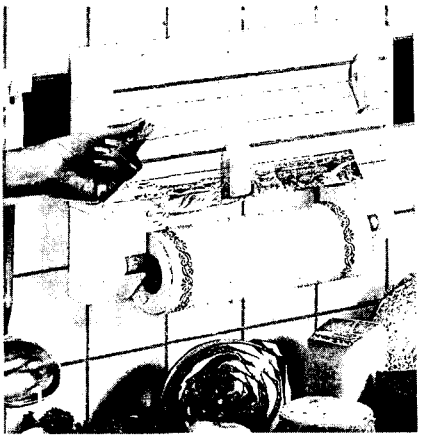
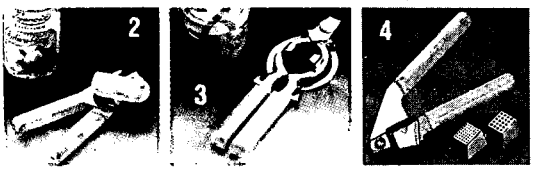
MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ PERFECT KITCHEN ROLL DISPENSER AND 3 PIECE KITCHEN TOOL KIT

Do kitchen wraps have you all thumbs? Then THE Perfect Kitchen Dispenser is for you. It's the only one that, cut after cut, holds the roll end ready to be picked up and pulled out for the next sheet. The two "neat sheet" cutters feature stainless steel blades for cutting that's a cinch. Holds standard rolls of cling-film, aluminum foil, or wax paper plus a paper towel holder. Simple front loading procedure makes replacement a snap. Sleek white and grey design fits any decor. But there's more: it comes with state of the art hand can opener, super strong jar and bottle opener, and impressive garlic/onion press with 2 inserts for fine and coarse pressing. So get a handle on kitchen wraps and treat yourself. **$69.98** ($8.50) #A1954.

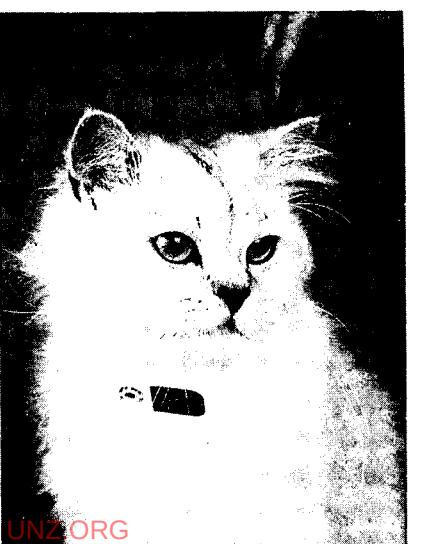


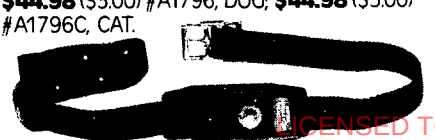


1. DISPENSER
2. HAND CAN OPENER
3. JAR AND BOTTLE OPENER
4. GARLIC/ONION PRESS

▼ DO FLEAS HAVE EARS?

The Microtech Flea Collar with its blasts of ultrasound creates such an intolerable environment that fleas and ticks abandon their pet hosts within 5 days. It is designed specifically for fleas and focuses on a 4' zone of protection, the Microtech Collar outperforms other kinds of ultrasonic pest chasers. A vast improvement over poison powders and chemical collars. Works on cats *or* dogs. Adjustable 19" collar fits 97% of dogs and runs for 6-8 months on 2 lithium cells (included). You can afford to see if it *really* works because you are fully protected by our guarantee — you have nothing to lose but the fleas! **$44.98** ($3.00) #A1796, DOG; **$44.98** ($3.00) #A1796C, CAT.





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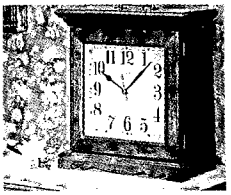
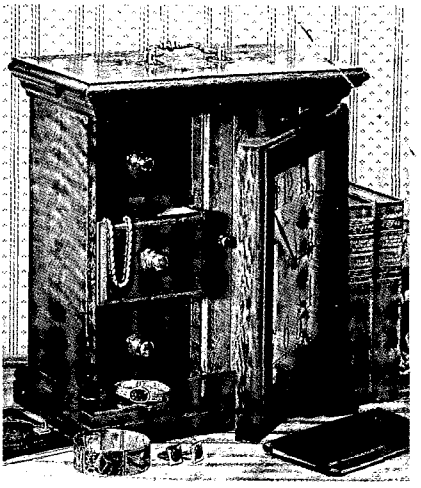
▼ A TIMELY SECRET



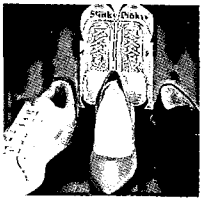
Do you have valuables or other important items that need a secure and secret hiding place? Why not store them in an elegant 17th century reproduction of a mantelpiece clock! Handcrafted in cherry, and accented with solid brass, the clock has large antique style numbers and features a quartz powered movement. This lovely accent piece measures 13" (h) x 11¾" (w) x 6½" (d) and will grace any dresser, desk or mantel. The clock face opens to reveal 3 fabric lined drawers and a larger (10" x 4" x 3¾"), compartment, complete with key. Beauty and security in one lovely piece—what a timely idea! **$99.98** ($8.00) #A1917.



▼ TEACH AN OLD LAMP NEW TRICKS

Any lamp that takes a standard bulb can be updated with the Touchtronic dimmer. No rewiring needed-just screw into lamp socket. Then your touch on any metal part becomes the "switch"-touch once for low light, again for medium, a third time for full wattage. Handy when you're entering a dark room, great at bedside and a real comfort to the arthritic or the ill. You'll save time, money and electricity-no more 3-way bulbs to buy and you pay for only as much light as you need. U.L. listed; one-year factory warranty. **$15.98** ($4.00) #A1700. 2 for **$27.98** ($6.00) #A17002.

▼ FRESHENED FOOTWEAR



Just put a Stinky Pinky "sock" in each shoe and overnight odor is gone, absorbed by the special blend of all natural earth materials. Works in running shoes, sneakers, boots, leather shoes, anything that goes on your feet. And keeps on working, too—just put Stinky Pinkys out in the sun for a day every three months or so to restore their odor-catching ability. Three pairs of Stinky Pinkys, enough for 6 shoes or boots, costs **$19.98** ($4.00) #13263.

TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept.031EL, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

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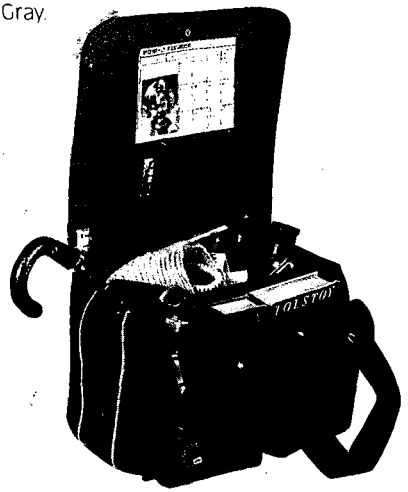
MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

▼ EVERYTHING BAG

People on the go always have so much to carry around. The Everything Bag makes it a snap. This oversized shoulder bag is constructed of tough, water-resistant canvas material and features nine roomy pockets. Plus, an unusual zipper design enables the bag to expand to double its normal width—to a full eight inches. Adjustable 2" wide straps provides a real comfort feature. In 3 great colors. **$24.98** ($4.00) #A1955-Blue; #A1956-Khaki; #A1957-Gray.



TO ORDER: Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept.031 EL, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 6% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

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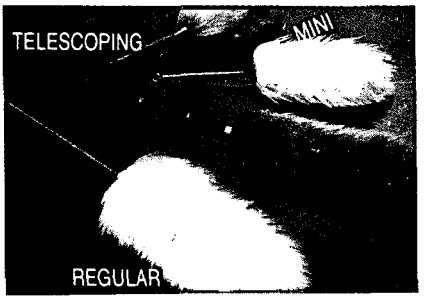
▼ LAMBSWOOL DUSTERS



Lambswool contains a natural static charge that makes dust literally leap off surfaces. Our dusters are imported from England. They are the fluffiest, highest quality lambswool in the world! We offer a set of four lambswool dusters: our 27" duster, our telescoping duster which extends to more than four feet—lets you reach high corners, top shelves, overhead lights and collapses to 28", and two mini dusters. **$22.98** ($4.00) #A1870.

▼ TALKING ALARM CLOCK

Tired of waking up to an annoying buzz? Why not awake to a crowing rooster and time report! Our battery operated talking alarm clock announces the hour and gives the time with the push of a button. Sleek design in white with LCD readout. Takes 4 "AA" batteries (not included). 5½"x 3"x4". **$27.98** ($4.50) #A1916.

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